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STARTLING stories

A THRILLING PUBLICATION

featuring **THE HOUSES OF ISZM** *a novel by Jack Vance*
and **RUNAWAY** *a novelet by Leigh Brackett*

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STARTLING stories

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His was a strange mission to a planet where the walls had ears—as well as the surprising power of FIGHTING BACK!

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THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY IT SOME TIME. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—get across to *him or her your ideas*? That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be intentionally, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

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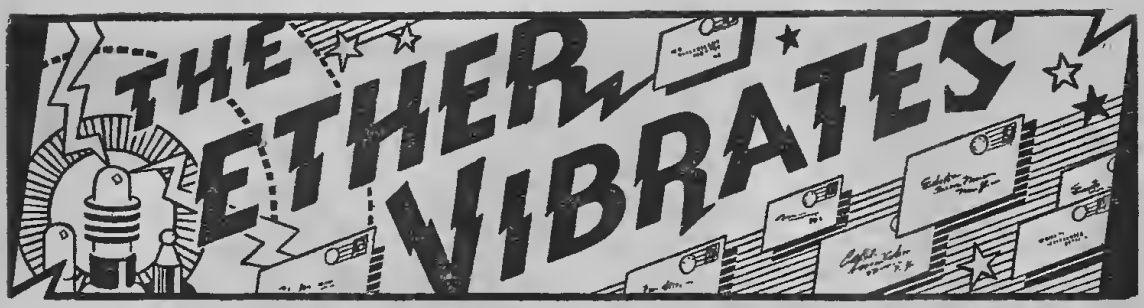

A Science Fiction Department Featuring Letters From Readers

IT IS a small but active gratification to us that this column's fame has spread far beyond the limits of its own circulation. To find it mentioned with awe in competing magazines is monosodium glutamate to the editorial soul. Awe, of course, is the proper response—we are affected that way ourselves most times looking over the originations of our correspondents. Being mentioned in other magazines is also a tribute to the discrimination of our brother editors, may they flourish like the green bay tree.

We believe it is no secret that we have run this letter column strictly for laughs and that any who enter here with solemn intent do so at their own risk. But if you attained some laughs out of the contrived confusion which is the order of the day, you may be intrigued to know that some of the funniest skits were those which never saw the printed page.

Why not? Well, many of them were libelous, of course. Our correspondents' talent for abuse amounts to genius. It is admittedly infectious, so much so that a cool head and a steady hand on the tiller are needed to keep from being boarded and overrun.

The most common type of letter which doesn't get printed is not libelous, however, it is indecipherable. Either we have genuine correspondents from Mars or some of the boys let their enthusiasm run away with them. In either case a certain percentage of the mail arrives written in code, cipher or gibberish—we never do have the time to break the code and find out.

Then there are other letter writers who have taken our calm statement that we are immune to both flattery and insult as a personal challenge and are knocking themselves out in an effort to shatter our tranquility. Such an effort might run something like this: (all insulting salutations have been removed in the interests of harmony.)

Some creep who wanted to get even with me gave me a subscription to your magazine. I never read it of course, I just use it to scare the kids next door when they run through my zinnias. Those covers would scare anybody. I never look at them of course, but why don't you get more Schomberg covers. And I think your novels are slipping—my chart shows a .0003 decline in quality since summer in the longer stories. I never read them of course.

It's a good thing he never does read them, or we'd really be in for a bad time. You know what he's going to be when he grows up, don't you? An efficiency expert.

Then there's his identical twin who slops over on the other side:

Our fan club has nominated you for President—of the United States. Please wire us your acceptance and we will start flooding Congress with telegrams and letters proposing that SS be incorporated in the Congressional Record. We will also get up petitions to have you placed on the ballot. We expect to get between 200 and 7,000,000 signatures.

Somewhere between, no doubt. This kind of letter gets even gushier, but we have cleaned it up, since a lot of people have allergies of one kind or another.

Then there is the correspondent who always knows how to run a magazine better than you do. And his suggestions frequently run to four pages single spaced. Like this:

You've got the greatest mag in the world and I never miss an issue. (Anybody got an ish with THE LOVERS in it? I'll pay $2.50) Don't pay any attention to the people who want you to change. But why don't you:

1. Put out STARTLING every week. . .
2. Have Finlay
Schomburg
Emsh (check one)
Poulton
Lawrence
do ALL the illos
3. Do inside illustrations in color
4. Change the size to the same as the Saturday Evening Post
5. Get Ernest Hemingway and Mickey Spillane to write for you

6. Eliminate all stories and just run letters from the readers
7. Eliminate everything but the fan column review
8. Just print long novels
9. Just print short stories
10. Just print a portfolio of Finlay drawings

This can go on for pages, but you get the idea. We always give reader suggestions close attention—sometimes for as much as five seconds at a time.

Then we have the collectors. There are large numbers of these and the lament runs like this:

Who do I have to kill to get that Schomburg cover on the August ish? (us—Ed.) This is without doubt, the most stunning, gorgeous, priceless bit of art work ever created by man. Michelangelo was a ham compared to Schomburg. There's a bare spot on my basement wall which is just crying for this picture. Life is meaningless to me without it. I've just GOT TO HAVE IT. I'm desperate. I'll trade anything you want for it—my house, my 1942 Chevvy, my wife—name it and you can have it. But for Pete's sake answer me immediately by wire because I'm going CRAZY!

Presumably he and his cohorts went crazy in droves because our stock answer had to be that even if everybody lined up there was only one painting and several hundred requests, so it was obviously impossible to give it to anyone.

Then there was the fan who could write better than any of our authors. He blistered us with scorn.

Hah! You call THE LOVERS a story? You think de Camp can write? Or Merwin? Phooey. My kid brother, aged three, is a little feeble-minded and can't walk or feed himself yet, but he can write better than any so-called author you've got. Do you realize that for two cents a word you can have *my* genius, which is so tremendous that it frightens even me? I am now preparing a 150,000 word novel which is the greatest literary masterpiece since the Bible. I am sending it only to you as soon as it is finished. You will have no hesitation in buying it because it is the most unusual and brilliant story you have ever seen. Please send the check immediately as I need it badly.

If this missive seems far-fetched to you, dismiss the thought. We get thousands of them. And each one makes us wince a little, but practical experience has somewhat bolstered us. For almost none of these coruscating masterpieces are ever finished. And still fewer actually arrive (with postage due) in this office. Needless to add, those which do are hopeless.

(Continued on page 118)

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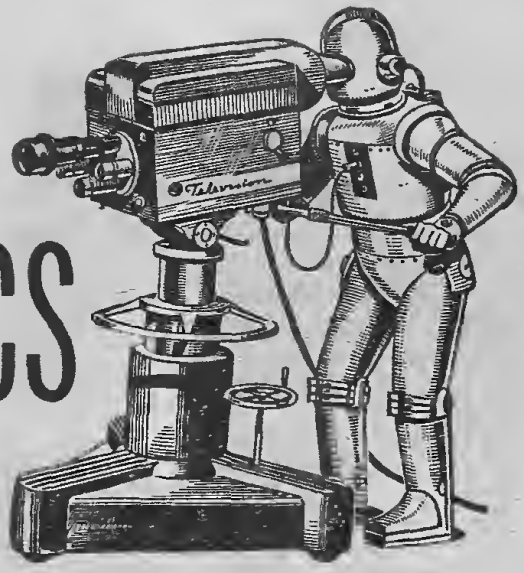
Electronic Private Eye

VIDEO-TECHNICS

by PAT JONES



IN HOLLYWOOD recently, TV turned detective to give police an eye-witness view of thieves at work. While such an application of TV beyond its questionable entertainment value is old hat to our readers, we are always happy to record events which go to show that yesterday's science fiction is indeed today's fact.

No publicity man's brainstorm, here is what actually happened. (Just want to get the facts, Ma'm.) The scene was a stockroom of an RCA television service branch In Hollywood. The loot was some $38,000 worth of TV equipment. Its loss was disclosed by a routine inventory check which executives were at a loss to explain. Our job? Get 'em.

Recalling, perhaps, some gimmick from science fiction, officials decided to employ a novel type of crime investigator. With apologies to Jack Webb, and the approval of local police officers, a TV camera unit was placed among the rafters of the stockroom with the lens focused on the loading platform. The TV receiver and the viewing screen were placed in a room some distance away.

For the next two weeks police watched the receiver as it was trained on the loading platform. While most of what transpired was routine operation, the camera also recorded the suspicious behavior of one clerk. Seems that on Tuesdays and Thursdays, during the lunch hour when few people were about, the suspect casually placed a number of boxes of TV tubes on the loading platform. Apparently on schedule, a pick-up truck backed into the driveway, the suspect loaded the purloined boxes, and the truck pulled away—right under the eyes of the watchful police!

The next step was obvious. Without arousing the suspect's suspicions, a simple trap was set. The police merely watched for the next "shipment" of tubes to leave the plant, then followed the truck to its destination and promptly apprehended the culprits.

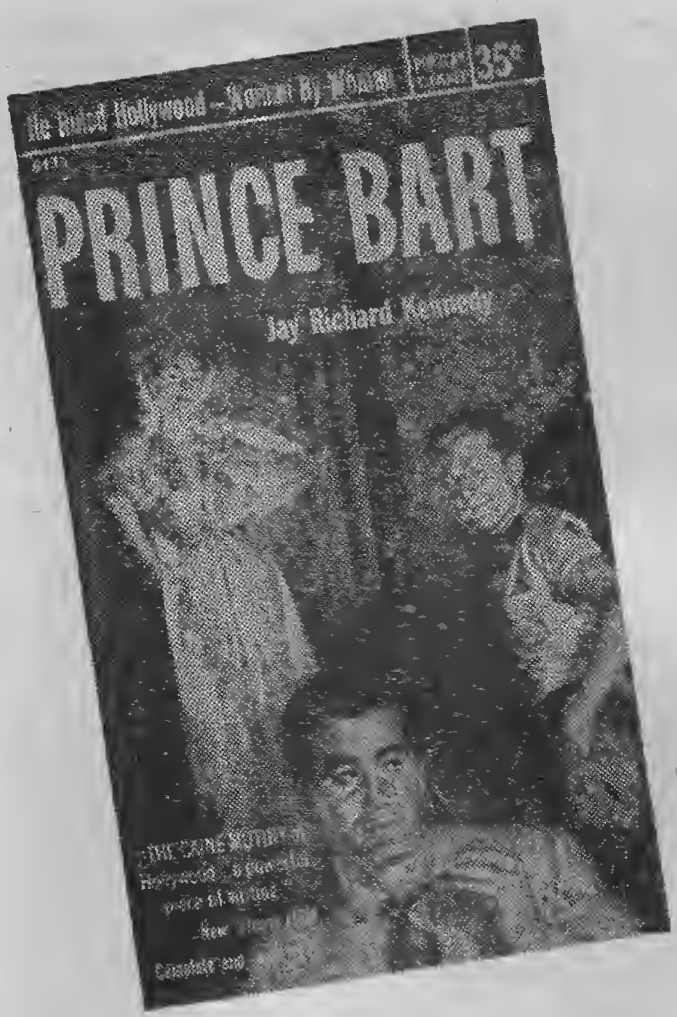
"Easiest work we ever did," remarked one of the arresting officers. "And for once I don't mind giving credit to a private eye —especially an electronic private eye!"

The hero of the piece is a TV unit of a type often used industrially since it fits handily into locations where direct view is required, but a human viewer cannot be accommodated. The RCA Vidicon tube is the heart of the system and is only six inches long and an inch in diameter. The camera that is built around the tube is no larger than a 16-mm movie camera, and is just as easy to handle.

The unit is completed by a connecting cable and a compact control monitor with a ten-inch viewing screen. When required, other receivers can be attached to the monitor, and the controls allow the camera focus to be controlled from the receiving end.

Such units are used elsewhere in patrolling, guarding, transmitting fingerprints and signatures, checking numbers of freight cars, supervising operations of machinery at a distance (such as chemical experiments or work where radiation can be harmful to humans) and recording data in rockets. But so far the detective duty is the most dramatic application of the TV camera to a robot function.

What we're trying to tell you is this: better watch out. You can't tell who—or what—may be watching.



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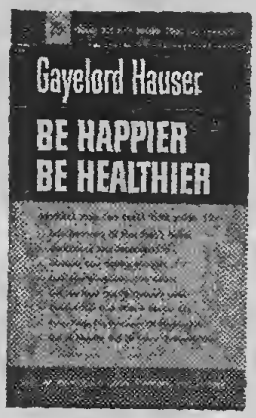

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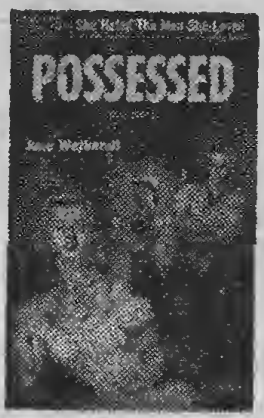

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June Wetherell
The bitter story of a woman's desperate struggle for decency.
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The Houses

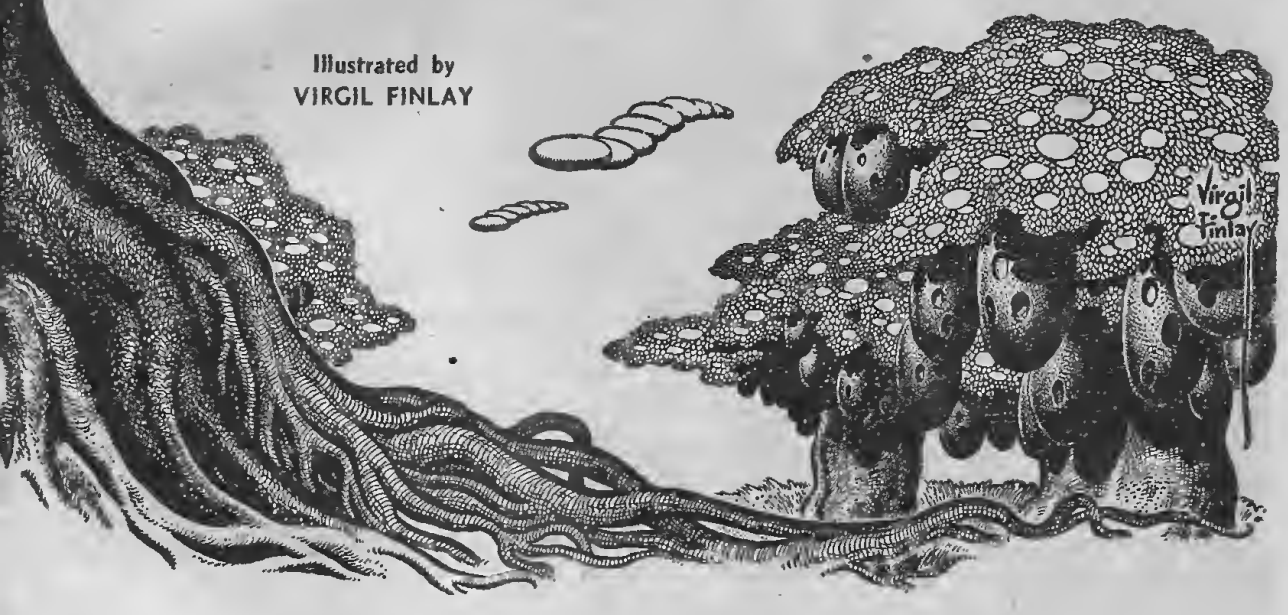
His was a strange mission to a planet where the walls had ears—and a power to fight back....

I

IT WAS assumed as a matter of course that visitors came to Iszm with a single purpose: to steal a female house. Cosmographers, students, babes-in-arms, notorious scoundrels: the Iszic cynically applied the same formula to all—microscopic inspection of mind and body, detailed surveillance.

Only the fact that they turned up so many house-thieves justified the procedure.

From a distance, it seemed simple enough to steal a house. A seed no larger than a grain of barley could be sewn into a strap; a seedling could be woven into the pattern of a shawl; a young shoot could be taped to a rocket-missile and launched



Illustrated by
VIRGIL FINLAY

# of Iszm

A Novel by JACK VANCE

into space. There were a thousand foolproof ways to steal an Iszic house; all had been tried, and the unsuccessful thieves had been conducted to the Mad House, their Iszic escorts courteous to the last. As realists, the Iszic knew that some day—in a year, a hundred years, a thousand years—the monopoly would be broken. Their worst fear was that a skillful botanist would obtain pollen and egg from a house during one of the fertile periods.

Aile Farr was a tall, gaunt man in his thirties, with a droll corded face, big hands and feet with skin, eyes, and hair all the same dust-colored monochrome. More important to the Iszic, he was a botanist.

Arriving at Jhespiezan atoll aboard the Red Ball Packet *Queen of Sweden,* he encountered suspicion remarkable even in Iszm. Two of the Szecr, the elite police, met him at the exit hatch, escorted him down the gangway like a prisoner, ushered him into a peculiar one-way passage. Flexible spines grew from the walls in the direction of passage; a man could enter the hall, but he could not change his mind and return. The end of the passage was closed by a sheet of clear glass; at this point Farr could move neither forward nor back.

An Iszic in wine-red and gray stripes stepped forward, examined him through the glass. Farr felt like a specimen in a case. The Iszic grudgingly slid the panel back, led Farr into a small private room. With the Szecr standing at his back, Farr turned over his debarkation slip, his health certificate, his bond of good character, his formal entry application. The clerk dropped the debarkation slip into a macerator, inspected and returned the certificate and bond, settled himself to a study of the application.

The Iszic eye, split into major and minor segments, is capable of double focus; the clerk read with the lower fraction of his eyes, appraising Farr with the top section.

" 'Occupation'—" he turned both segments of his eyes on Farr, then flicking the bottom one back, read on in a cool monotone. "—research associate. Place of business—Los Angeles Botanical Institute.' " He lay the application form to one side. "May I inquire your motives for visiting Iszm?"

Farr's patience was wearing thin. He pointed to the application. "I've written it all down."

The clerk read without taking his eyes from Farr, who watched in fascination, marvelling at the feat.

"I'm on sabbatical leave," read the clerk. "I am visiting a number of worlds where plants contribute most effectively to the welfare of man." The clerk focussed both eye fractions on Farr. "I expect that you are acquainted with our laws."

"How could I avoid it?" said Farr in irritation. "I've been briefed ever since the ship left Starholme."

"You understand that you will be allowed no special privileges—no exhaustive or analytical study . . . you understand?"

"Of course."

"Our regulations are stringent—I must emphasize this. Many visitors forget, and involve themselves with severe penalties."

"By now," said Farr wearily, "I know your laws better than I know my own."

"It is illegal to lift, detach, cut, accept, secrete or remove any vegetable matter, vegetable fragment, seed, seedling, sapling or tree, no matter where you find it."

"I intend nothing illegal."

"Most of our visitors say the same," responded the clerk. "Kindly step into the next chamber, remove all your clothes and personal effects. These will be returned to you at your departure."

Farr looked at him blankly. "My money—my camera—my—"

"You will be issued Iszic equivalents."

FARR wordlessly entered a white enameled chamber where he undressed. An attendant packed his clothes in a glass box, pointed out that Farr had neglected to remove his ring.

"I suppose if I had false teeth you'd

want them too," growled Farr.

"No," said the Iszic humorlessly. "They would be examined and returned to you."

An Iszic in a tight white and gray uniform entered the room, carrying a hypodermic.

Farr drew back. "What's this!"

"A harmless radiant."

"I don't need any."

"It is necessary," said the medic, "for your own protection. Most visitors hire boats and sail out upon the Pheadh. Occasionally there are storms, the boats are blown off course. This radiant will

"Thank you," said the operative. "Clothes and whatever personal effects you may need will be issued in the next room."

Farr dressed in visitor's uniform; white soft trousers, a gray and green striped smock, a loose dark-green velvet beret that fell low over his ear. "Now may I go?"

The attendant looked into a slot beside him. Farr could see a flicker of bright characters. "You are Farr Sainh the research botanist." It was as if he had said, "You are Farr, the admitted criminal."

Goldfish Bowl

ABOUT the time BIG PLANET was published (SS, September 1952) Jack Vance lost his intellectual privacy. BIG PLANET was a large hit; the fans who were trying to prove that Vance was Henry Kuttner finally gave up; and our own modest comment that we considered Vance one of the truly great story-tellers of our time combined to crystallize him as a writer. Now the analysts are going to work on his style, importance and message in a manner which must give him a quiet chuckle now and then. Message or no, he remains a superb story-teller; a writer who can weave magic with words. If HOUSES OF ISZM is your first Vance story . . . well, you take it from here. ***—The Editor***

define your position on the master panel."

"I don't want to be protected," said Farr. "I don't want to be a light on a panel."

"Then you must leave Iszm."

Farr submitted, cursing the medic for the length of the needle and the quantity of radiant.

"Now—into the next room for your tri-type, if you please."

Farr shrugged, walked into the next room.

"On the gray disk, Farr Sainh—palms forward, eyes wide."

He stood rigid; feeler-planes brushed down his body. In a glass dome a three-dimensional simulacrum of himself six inches high took form. Farr inspected it sourly.

"I'm Farr."

"There are several formalities awaiting you."

The formalities required three hours. Farr was once more given to the Szecr, who examined him carefully.

He was finally allowed his freedom. A young man in the yellow and green stripes of the Szecr escorted him to a gondola floating in the lagoon, a long slender craft grown from a single pod. Farr gingerly took a seat and was sculled across to the city of Jhespiezan.

It was his first experience of an Iszic city, and it was far richer than his mental picture. The houses grew at irregular intervals along the avenues and canals—heavy gnarled trunks, supporting first the lower pods, then masses of broad leaves, half-submerging the upper pod-

banks. Something stirred in Farr's memory; an association . . . yeasts or mycetozoa under the microscope. *Lamproderma violaceum? Dictydium cancellatum?* There was the same proliferation of branches. The pods might have been magnified sporangia. There was the same arched well-engineered symmetry, the peculiar complex colors: dark blue overlaid with glistening gray down, burnt orange with a scarlet luster, scarlet with a purple over-glow, sooty green, white highlighted with pink, subtle browns and near-blacks. The avenues below drifted with the Iszic population, a quiet pale people, secure in the stratifications of their guilds and castes.

The gondola glided to the landing. A Szecr in a yellow beret with green tassels was waiting—apparently a man of importance. There was no formal introduction; the Szecr discussed Farr quietly between themselves.

Farr saw no reason to wait, and started up the avenue, toward one of the new cosmopolitan hotels. The Szecr made no attempt to stop him; Farr was now on his own, subject only to surveillance.

He relaxed and loafed around the city for almost a week. He explored the canals and the lagoon in gondolas, he strolled the avenues. At least three of the Szecr gave him their time, quietly following along the avenues, lounging in nearby pods on the public terraces.

One phase of the surveillance puzzled Farr. He approached the lieutenant, indicated an operative a few yards away.

"Why does he mimic me? I sit down, he sits down. I drink, he drinks. I scratch my nose, he scratches his nose."

"A special technique," explained the Szecr. "We divine the pattern of your thinking."

"It won't work," said Farr.

The lieutenant bowed. "Farr Sainh may be quite correct."

Farr smiled indulgently. "Do you seriously think you can predict my plans?"

"We can only do our best."

"This afternoon I plan to rent a seagoing boat. Were you aware of that?"

The lieutenant produced a paper. "I have the charter ready for you. It is the *Lhaiz,* and I have arranged a crew."

II

THE *Lhaiz* was a two-masted barque the shape of a Dutch wooden shoe, with purple sails and a commodious cabin. It had been grown on a special boat-tree, one piece even to the main-mast, which originally had been the stem of the pod. The foremast, sprit, booms and rigging were fabricated parts, a situation as irking to the Iszic mind as mechanical motion to an Earth electronics engineer. The crew of the *Lhaiz* wore bands of yellow and green: quite openly Szecr. They obeyed orders with courtesy, watched Farr from all angles, searched his cabin as a casual daily routine.

The *Lhaiz* sailed west; atolls rose over the horizon, sank astern. Some were deserted little gardens; others were given to the breeding, seeding, budding, grafting, sorting, packing and shipping of houses.

As a botanist, Farr was most strongly interested in the plantations, but here the surveillance intensified, became a review of his every motion.

At Tjiere atoll irritation and perversity led Farr to evade his guards. The *Lhaiz* sailed up to the pier; two of the crew passed lines ashore; the others furled sail, cradled booms. Aile Farr jumped easily from the after-deck down to the pier, set off toward the shore. A mutter of complaints came from behind; these gave Farr malicious amusement.

He looked ahead to the island. The pier became a concrete deck which led down under a ridge of weathered basalt. The beach spread wide to either side, pounded by surf, and the slopes of the basalt ridge were swathed in green, blue and black vegetation—a scene of supervised peace and beauty. Farr controlled the urge to jump down on the beach to disappear under the leaves. The Szecr were polite, but very quick on the trigger.

A tall strong man appeared upon the dock ahead. Blue bands circled his body

and limbs at six inch intervals, the pallid Iszic skin showing between. Farr slackened his pace. Freedom was at an end.

The Iszic lifted a single-lensed lorgnette on an ebony rod: the viewer habitually carried by high-caste Iszic, an accessory almost as personal as one of their organs. Farr had been viewed many times; it never failed to irritate him. Like any other visitor to Iszm, like the Iszic themselves he had no choice, no recourse, no defense. The radiant injected into his shoulder had labelled him; he was now categorized and defined for anyone who cared to look.

"Your pleasure, Farr Sainh?" The Iszic used the dialect which children spoke before they learned the language of their caste.

Farr resignedly made the formal reply. "I await your will."

"The dock-master was sent to extend proper courtesy. You perhaps became impatient?"

"My arrival is a small matter; please don't trouble yourself."

The Iszic flourished his view. "A privilege to greet a fellow-scientist."

Farr said sourly, "That thing even tells you my occupation?"

The Iszic viewed Farr's right shoulder. "I see you have no criminal record; your intelligence index is 23; your persistence level is Class 4. . . There is other information."

"Who am I privileged to address?" asked Farr.

"I call myself Zhde Patasz; I am fortunate enough to cultivate on Tjiere atoll."

Farr re-appraised the blue-striped man. "A planter?"

Zhde Patasz twirled his viewer. "We will have much to discuss. I hope you will be my guest."

The dock-master came puffing up; Zhde Patasz flourished his viewer, drifted away.

"Farr Sainh," said the dock-master, "Your modesty leads you to evade your entitled escort; it saddens us deeply."

"You exaggerate."

"Hardly possible. This way, Sainh."

HE MARCHED down the concrete incline into a wide trench, with Farr sauntering behind so leisurely that the dock-master was forced to halt and wait at hundred-foot intervals. The trench led under the basalt ridge, became a subterranean passage. Four times the dock-master slid aside plate-glass panels; four times the doors swung shut behind. Farr realized that search-screens, probes, detectors, analyzers were feeling him, testing his radiations, his mass, metallic content. He strolled along indifferently. They would find nothing. All his clothing and personal effects had been impounded; he was still wearing the visitor's uniform, trousers of white floss, a jacket striped gray and green, the loose dark green velvet beret.

The dock-master rapped at a door of corrugated metal. It parted in the middle into two interlocking halves, like a medieval portcullis; the passage opened into a bright room. Behind a counter sat a Szecr in the usual yellow and green stripes.

"If the Sainh pleases—his tri-type for our records."

Farr patiently stood on the disk of gray metal.

"Palms forward, eyes wide."

Farr stood quietly. Feeler-planes brushed down his body.

"Thank you, Sainh." Farr stepped up to the counter. "That's a different type to the one at Jhespiezan. Let's see it."

The clerk showed him a transparent card with a manlike brownish splotch on its middle. "Not much of a likeness," said Farr.

The Szecr dropped the card into a slot. The replica appeared on the counter-top. It could be expanded a hundred times, revealing finger-prints, cheek-pores, ear and retinal configuration.

"I'd like to have this as a souvenir," said Farr. "It's dressed. The one at Jhespiezan showed my charms to the world."

The Iszic shrugged. "Take it."

Farr put the replica in his pouch.

"Now, Farr Sainh, may I ask an impertinent question?"

"One more won't hurt me."

Farr knew there was a cephaloscope focussed on his brain; any pulse of excitement, any flush of fear would be recorded on a chart. He brought the image of a hot bath to the brink of his mind.

"Do you plan to steal houses, Farr Sainh?"

Now: *the placid cool porcelain, the feel of warm air and water, the scent of soap.*

"No."

"Are you aware of, or party to, any such plan?"

Warm water, lie back, relax.

"No."

The Szecr sucked in his lips, a grimace of polite skepticism. "Are you aware of the penalties visited upon thieves?"

"Oh yes," said Farr. "They go to the Mad House."

"Thank you, Farr Sainh; you may proceed."

III

THE dock-master relinquished Farr to a pair of under-Szecr in pale yellow and gold bands.

"This way, if you please."

They climbed a ramp, stepped out into an arcade with a glassed-in wall.

Farr stopped to survey the plantation; his guides made uneasy motions, anxious to proceed.

"If Farr Sainh desires—"

"Just a minute," said Farr. "There's no hurry."

On his right hand was the town, a forest of intricate shapes and colors. To the back grew the modest three-pod houses of the laborers; they could hardly be seen for the magnificent array along the lagoon—houses of the planters, the Szecr, the house-breeders and house-breakers. Each was different, trained and shaped by secrets the Iszic even withheld from each other.

They were beautiful, thought Farr, but in a weird indecisive way they puzzled him; just as sometimes the palate falters on a new flavor: pleasant or disgusting? He decided that environment influenced his judgment. Iszic houses on Earth looked habitable enough. This was Iszm; any attribute of a strange planet shared the basic strangeness.

He turned his attention to the fields. They spread off to his left, various shades of brown, gray, gray-green, green according to the age and variety of the plant. Each field had its long low shed where mature seedlings were graded, labelled, potted and packed for destinations around the universe.

The two young Szecr began to mutter in the language of their caste; Farr turned away from the window.

"This way, Farr Sainh."

"Where are we going?"

"You are the guest of Zhde Patasz Sainh."

Excellent, thought Farr. He had examined the houses exported to Earth, the Class AA houses sold by K. Penche. They would compare poorly with the houses the planters grew for themselves.

He became aware of the two young Szecr. They were standing like statues, staring at the floor of the arcade.

"What's the matter?" asked Farr.

They began to breathe heavily. Farr looked at the floor. A vibration, a low roar. Earthquake! thought Farr. The sound grew louder; the windows rumbled in resonance. Farr felt a sudden wildness, a sense of emergency; he looked out the window. In a nearby field the ground broke up, took on a crazy hump, erupted. Tender seedlings crushed under tons of dirt. A metal snout protruded, grinding up ten feet, twenty feet. A door clanged open: tall brown men leapt out, ran into the fields, began to uproot young plants. In the door a man, grinning in the extremity of tension roared out incomprehensible orders.

FARR watched in fascination; a raid of tremendous scope! Horns rang out from Tjiere town; the vicious *fwipp-hiss* of shatter-bolts sounded. Two of the brown men became red clots; the man in the doorway bellowed, the others retreated to the metal snout.

The port clanged shut; but one raider had waited too long. He beat his fists on the hull, to no avail; he was ignored. Frantically he pounded and the seedlings he had gathered crushed in his grip.

The snout vibrated, lifted higher from the ground. The shatter-bolts from the Tjiere fort began to chip off flakes of metal. A bulls-eye port in the hull snapped open; a weapon spat blue flame. In Tjiere a great tree shattered, sagged. Farr's head swam to a tremendous soundless scream; the young Szecr dropped gasping to their knees.

The tree toppled; the great pods, the leaf-terraces, the tendrils, the careful balconies—they whistled through the air, crashed—a pitiful tangle. Iszic bodies hurtled from the ruins, kicking and twisting, others limp.

The metal snout ground up another ten feet. In a moment it would shake loose the soil, blast up and out into space. The brown man left outside fought for footing on the heaving soil, still pounding on the hull, but now without hope.

Farr looked at the sky. Three monitors were slipping down from the upper air—ugly awkward craft, metal scorpions.

A shatter-bolt smashed a crater in the soil beside the hull. The brown man was flung a looping sixty feet; he turned three cartwheels and landed on his back.

The metal hull began to churn back down into the soil, settling slowly at first, then faster and faster. Another shatter-bolt rang on the prow like a great hammer. The metal shrivelled, fragmented into ribbons. The hull was under the surface; clods of soil caved in on top.

Another shatter-bolt threw up a gout of dust.

The two young Szecr had risen to their feet; they stared out across the devastated field, crying out in a tongue meaningless to Farr. One grasped Farr's arm.

"Come, we must secure you. Danger, danger!"

Farr shook them off. "I'll wait here."

"Farr Sainh, Farr Sainh," they cried. "Our orders are to see to your safety."

"I'm safe here," said Farr. "I want to watch."

The three monitors hung over the crater, drifting back and forth.

"Looks like the raiders got away," said Farr.

"No! Impossible," cried the Szecr. "It's the end of Iszm!"

Down from the sky dropped a slender ship, smaller than the monitors. If the monitors were scorpions, the new vessel was a wasp. It settled over the crater, sank into the loose dirt—slowly, gingerly, like a probe. It began to roar, to vibrate; it churned out of sight.

ALONG the arcade came a dozen men, running with the sinuous back-leaning glide of the Iszic. Farr on an impulse fell in behind them, ignoring the distress of the two young Szecr.

The Iszic fled across the field toward the crater; Farr followed. He passed the limp body of the brown man, slowed, halted. The man's hair was heavy, light brown; his features were broad, blunt; he had something the look of a lion. His hand still clenched the seedlings he had uprooted. The fingers fell limp even as Farr came to a halt; at the same time the eyes opened. They held full intelligence; Farr bent forward half in pity, half in interest.

Hands gripped him; he saw yellow and green stripes, furious faces with lips drawn back to show the pallid Iszic mouth, the sharp teeth.

"Here!" cried Farr, as he was hustled off the field. "Let go!"

The Szecr fingers bit into his arms and shoulders; they were obsessed by a murderous madness, and Farr held his tongue.

Underfoot sounded a deep far rumble; the ground heaved.

The Szecr ran Farr toward Tjiere, then turned aside. Farr began to struggle, to drag his feet. Something hard struck the back of his neck; half-stunned, he made no further resistance. They took him to an isolated tree near the basalt scarp. It was very old, with a gnarled black trunk, a heavy umbrella of leaves,

two or three withered pods. An irregular hole gaped into the trunk; without ceremony they thrust him through.

IV

AILE FARR, screaming hoarsely, fell through the dark. He kicked, clawed at the air. His head scraped against the side of the shaft; then his shoulder struck, then his hip, then he was in full contact. The fall became a slide as the tube curved. His feet struck a membrane that seemed to collapse, then another and another. Seconds later he struck a resilient wall. The impact stunned him. He lay quiet, collecting his wits, feeling very sorry for himself.

He moved, felt his head. The scrape on his scalp smarted. He heard a peculiar noise, a hissing bumping rush; an object sliding down the tube. Farr scrambled to the side. Something hard and heavy struck him in the ribs; something struck the wall with a thump and a groan. There was silence except for the sound of shallow breathing.

Farr said cautiously, "Who's there?"

No answer.

Farr repeated the question in all his languages and dialects—still no answer. He hunched himself up uneasily. He had no light, no means of making fire.

The breathing became stertorous, labored. Farr groped through the dark, felt a crumpled body. He rose to his knees, laid the unseen figure flat, straightening the arms and legs. The breathing became more regular.

Farr sat back on his haunches, waiting. Five minutes passed. The walls of the room gave a sudden pulse; Farr heard a deep sound like a distant explosion. A minute or two later the sound and the pulse occurred again. The underground battle was raging, thought Farr. Wasp against mole, an underground battle to the death.

A wave of pressure and sound rocked him; the walls heaved. An explosion that had a feeling of finality. The man in the dark gasped, coughed.

"Who's there?" Farr called.

A bright eye of light winked into his face; Farr winced, moved his head. The light followed.

"Turn that damn thing away!" growled Farr.

The light moved up and down his body, lingering on the striped visitor's shirt. In the reflected glow Farr saw the brown man, dirty, bruised, haggard.

The light went out. Both men lay silent, more or less indifferent to each other. Farr presently fell asleep. It was a restless sleep. His head seemed to smart and burn. He heard confidential voices and hoarse cries; he was home on Earth, and on his way to see—someone. A friend. Who? In his sleep Farr twisted and muttered. He knew he was asleep; he wanted to wake up.

The hollow voices, the footsteps, the restless images dwindled, and he slept soundly.

LIGHT streamed in through an oval gap, silhouetting the frames of two Iszic. Farr awoke. He was vaguely surprised to find the brown man gone. In fact, the entire room seemed different; he was no longer in the root of the gnarled black tree.

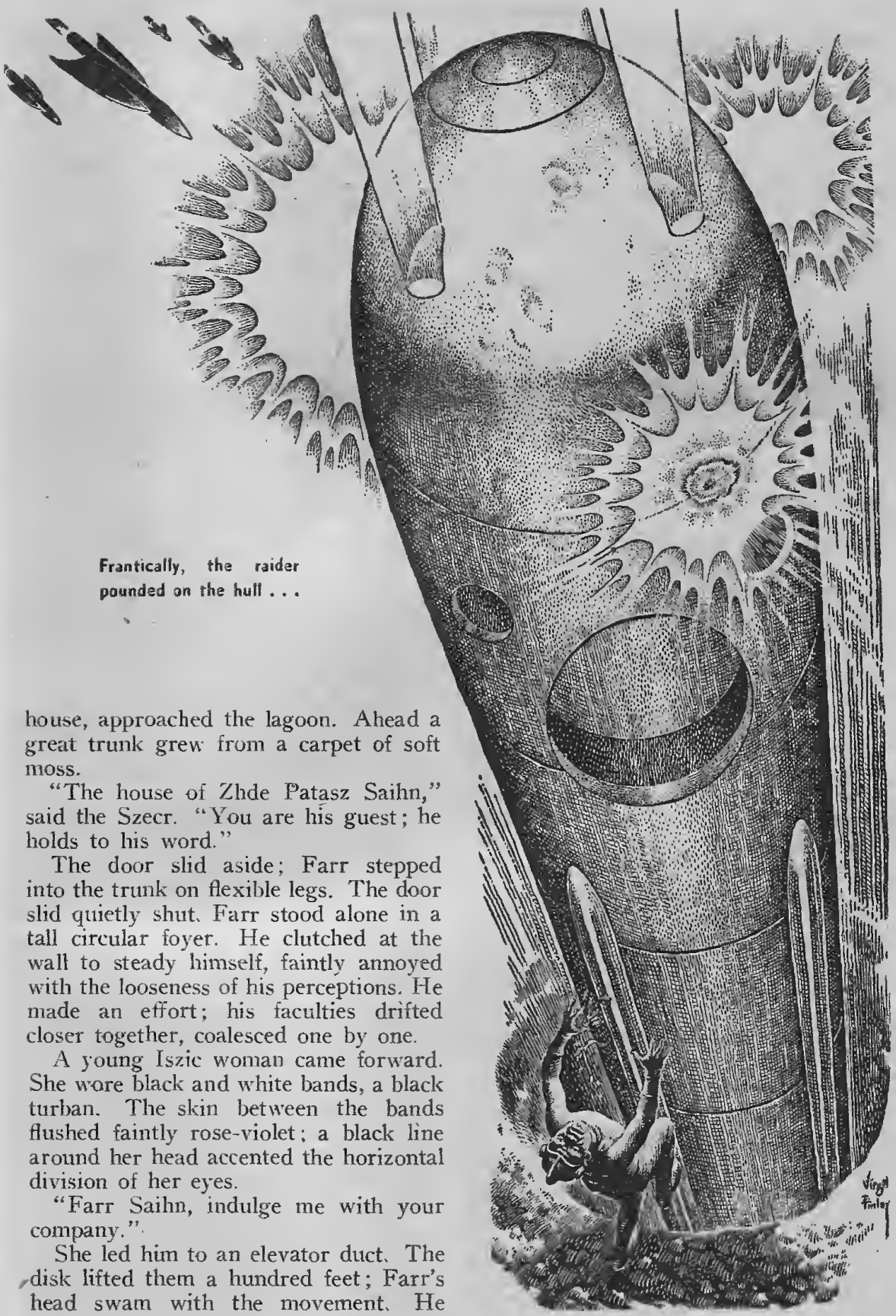
He struggled up in a sitting position. His eyes were dim and watery; he found it hard to think. There was no anchor for his thoughts; it was as if all the faculties of his mind were separate pieces falling free through the air.

"Aile Farr Sainh," said one of the Iszic, "may we trouble you to accompany us?" They wore yellow and green: Szecr.

Farr lurched to his feet, stumbled through the oval door. An elevator carried them to the surface. The Szecr slid back a panel: Farr found himself in the arcade he had traversed before.

They took him out into the open, under the night sky. The stars glittered; Farr noticed Home Sun a few degrees from Wath-Beta Aurigae; it aroused no pang, no home-sickness. He felt emotion toward nothing. He saw without attention; he felt light, easy, relaxed.

They skirted the tangle of the fallen



Frantically, the raider pounded on the hull . . .

house, approached the lagoon. Ahead a great trunk grew from a carpet of soft moss.

"The house of Zhde Patasz Saihn," said the Szecr. "You are his guest; he holds to his word."

The door slid aside; Farr stepped into the trunk on flexible legs. The door slid quietly shut. Farr stood alone in a tall circular foyer. He clutched at the wall to steady himself, faintly annoyed with the looseness of his perceptions. He made an effort; his faculties drifted closer together, coalesced one by one.

A young Iszic woman came forward. She wore black and white bands, a black turban. The skin between the bands flushed faintly rose-violet; a black line around her head accented the horizontal division of her eyes.

"Farr Saihn, indulge me with your company."

She led him to an elevator duct. The disk lifted them a hundred feet; Farr's head swam with the movement. He

felt the cool hand of the woman.

"Through here, Farr Saihn."

Farr stepped forward, halted, leaned against the wall until his vision cleared.

The woman waited patiently.

The blur lifted. He stood in the core of a branch; the woman supporting him with an arm around his wrist. He looked into the pale segmented eyes. She regarded him with indifference.

"Your people drugged me," muttered Farr.

"This way, Farr Sainh."

She started down the corridor with the sinuous gait that seemed to float her upper body. Farr followed slowly. His legs were stronger; he felt a little better.

The woman stopped by the terminal sphincter, turned, made a wide ceremonial sweep of her two arms. "Zhde Patasz Sainh awaits you."

FARR pushed through the sphincter into the pod. Zhde Patasz was not immediately to be seen. Farr moved slowly forward, looking from right to left. The pod was thirty feet long, opening on a balcony with a waist-high balustrade. The walls and domed ceiling were grown with silky green fiber; the floor was heavy with plum-colored moss; quaint lamps grew out of the wall. There were four magenta pod-chairs against one wall; in the middle of the floor stood a tall cylindrical vase containing water, plants and black dancing eels. There were pictures on the walls: Earth pictures, by the old master Van Gogh: colorful curios from a strange world.

Zhde Patasz came in from the balcony. "Farr Saihn, I hope you feel well?"

"Well enough."

"Will you sit?"

Farr lowered himself upon one of the frail magenta bladders. The smooth skin stretched, fitted itself to his body. Farr rubbed his head. "What the devil did you do to me?"

"I will be candid," said Zhde Patasz. "The Szecr administered a hypnotic atmosphere to the Thord. By an error you had been conveyed into the same cell."

Farr knew that he should be angry. He tried to speak with indignation. "You've totally ignored my rights, and you've violated the Treaty of Access."

Zhde Patasz responded soberly. "I hope you will forgive us. You realize we must protect our fields."

"I had nothing to do with the raid."

"Yes. We understand that."

Farr smiled bitterly. "While I was under hypnosis you siphoned out everything I know."

"Only matters pertaining to the raid." Zhde Patasz was trying to conciliate Farr. "We are perhaps over-assiduous, but you seemed a conspirator; you must recognize that."

"I'm afraid I don't."

"No?" Zhde Patasz seemed surprised. "You arrive at Tjiere on the day of the assault. You attempt to evade your escort at the dock. During an interview you make pointless attempts to control your reactions; forgive me if I show you your errors."

"Not at all; go right ahead."

"In the arcade you once more evaded your escort; you raced out on the field: an apparent effort to take part in the raid."

"This is all nonsense," said Farr.

"We are satisfied of this," said Zhde Patasz. "The raid has ended in disaster for the Thord. We destroyed the mole at a depth of eleven hundred feet; there were no survivors except the person with whom you shared a cell."

"What will happen to him?"

Zhde Patasz hesitated; Farr thought to detect uncertainty in his voice. "Under normal conditions he would have been perhaps the least lucky of all." He paused, forming his thoughts into words. "We have faith in the deterrent effect of punishment. He would have been confined to the Mad House."

"What happened to him?"

"He killed himself in the cell."

Farr felt suddenly bewildered, as if this were an unexpected development. Somehow the brown man was obligated

to him; something was lost. . . .

Zhde Patasz said in a voice full of solicitude, "You appear shocked, Farr Saihn."

"I don't know why I should be."

"Are you tired, or weak?"

"I'm collecting myself a little at a time."

THE Iszic woman came with a tray of food—spice-nuts, a hot aromatic liquid, dried fish.

Farr ate with pleasure; he was hungry. Zhde Patasz watched him curiously. "It is strange. We are of different worlds, we evolved from different stock. Yet we share a number of similar ambitions, similar fears and desires. We protect our possessions, the objects which bring us security."

Farr felt the raw spot on his scalp; it still smarted and pulsed; he nodded thoughtfully.

Zhde Patasz strolled to the glass cylinder; looked down at the dancing eels. "Sometimes we are over-anxious, of course; and our fears cause us to overreach ourselves." He turned. They surveyed each other a long moment; Farr half-submerged in the chair-pod, the Iszic tall and strong, the double eyes large in his thin aquiline head.

"In any event," said Zhde Patasz, "I hope you will forget our mistake. The Thord are responsible. But for them the situation would not have arisen. Unless," he added humorously, "you were planning a crime of your own."

Farr said sourly, "You must have learned everything about me there was to learn."

Zhde Patasz bowed politely. "We must protect our investment; we are businessmen."

"Not very g o o d businessmen," growled Farr.

"Interesting. And why not?"

"You've got a good product," said Farr, "but you market it uneconomically. Limited sale, high mark-up."

Zhde Patasz brought out his viewer, waved it indulgently. "There are many theories."

Farr shook his head. "I've studied several careful analyses of the house trade. They disagree only in detail."

"What is the consensus?"

"That your methods are inefficient. On each planet a single dealer has the monopoly. It's a system which pleases only the dealer. K. Penche is a hundred times a millionaire and he's the most hated man on Earth."

Zhde Patasz swung his v i e w e r thoughtfully. "K. Penche will be an unhappy man as well as a hated one."

"Glad to hear it," said Farr. "Why?"

"The raid destroyed most of his quota."

"He won't get any houses?"

"Not of the kind he ordered."

"Well," said Farr, "it makes no great difference. He sells everything you send him anyway."

Zhde Patasz showed a trace of impatience. "He is an Earther—a mercantilist. We are Iszic; house-breeding is in our blood: a basic instinct. The line of planters began two hundred thousand years ago when Diun, the primordial anthrophib, crawled out of the ocean. With salt-water still draining from his gills he took refuge in a pod. He is my ancestor. We have gained mastery over houses; we shall not dissipate this accumulated lore, or permit ourselves to be plundered."

"The knowledge eventually will be duplicated," said Farr, "whether you like it or not. There are too many homeless people in the universe."

"No." Zhde Patasz snapped his viewer. "The craft cannot be induced rationally; an element of magic still exists."

"Magic?"

"Not literally. The trappings of magic. For instance—we sing incantations to sprouting seeds. The seeds sprout and prosper. Without incantations they fail. Why? Who knows? No one on Iszm. In every phase of growing, training and breaking the house for habitation, this special lore makes the difference between a house and a withered useless vine."

"On Earth," said Farr, "we would begin with the elemental tree. We would sprout a million seeds; we would explore a million primary avenues."

"After a thousand years," said the Iszic, "you might control the number of pods on a tree." He walked to the wall, stroked the green fiber. "This floss—we inject a liquid into an organ of the rudimentary pod. The liquid comprises substances such as powdered ammonite nerve, ash of the frunz bush, sodium isochromyl acetate, powder from the Phanodano meteorite. The liquid undergoes six critical operations, and must be injected through the proboscis of a sea-lympid. Tell me," he glanced at Farr through his viewer, "how long before your Earth researchers could grow green floss into a pod?"

"Perhaps we'd never try. We might be satisfied with five or six-pod houses the owners could furnish as they liked."

ZHDE PATASZ'S eyes snapped. "But this is crudity! You understand, do you not? A dwelling must be all of a unit—the walls, the drainage, the décor grown in! What use is our vast lore, our two hundred thousand years of effort, otherwise? Any ignoramus can paste up green floss; only an Iszic can grow it!"

"Yes," said Farr. "I believe you."

Zhde Patasz continued, passionately waving his viewer. "And if you stole a female house, and if you managed to breed a five-pod house, that is only the beginning. It must be entered, mastered, trained. The webbings must be cut; the nerves of ejaculation must be located and paralyzed. The sphincters must open and close at a touch.

"The art of house-breaking is almost as important as house-breeding. Without correct breaking a house is an unmanageable nuisance—a menace."

"K. Penche breaks none of the houses you send to Earth."

"Pah! Penche's houses are docile, spiritless. They are without interest; they lack beauty, grace." He paused. "I cannot speak. Your language has no words to tell what an Iszic feels for his house. He grows it, grows into it; his ashes are given it when he dies. He drinks its ichor; it breathes his breath. It protects him; it takes on the color of his thoughts. A spirited house will repel a stranger. An injured house will kill. And a Mad House—that is where we take our criminals."

Farr listened in fascination. "That's all very well—for an Iszic. An Earther isn't so particular. He just wants a house to live in."

"You may obtain houses," said Zhde Patasz. "We are glad to provide them. But you must use the accredited distributors."

"K. Penche?"

"Yes. He is our representative."

"I think I will go to bed," said Farr. "I am tired and my head hurts."

"My house is yours, Farr Sainh."

The young woman in the black turban conducted Farr to a small dim chamber with a soft couch. She ceremoniously bathed his face, his hands, his feet, sprayed the chamber with an aromatic scent, departed.

Farr fell into a fitful slumber. He dreamt of the brown man. He saw the blunt face, heard the heavy voice. The abrasion on his scalp stung like fire, and Farr twisted and turned.

The brown man's face disappeared like an extinguished light. Farr slept in peace.

V

A DAY later Farr took his leave of Tjiere atoll. Zhde Patasz pressed him to extend his visit; Farr declined, and was escorted to the dock by the same route he had come.

The *Lhaiz* looked almost like home; Farr jumped aboard with a feeling of relief. The crew came sleepily from the forecastle; the rigging creaked, the mooring-lines were cut loose, the sails sheeted home. Bubbling, breasting through the blue water, the *Lhaiz* put out to sea.

Farr's sense of relief soon vanished.

The crew were as vigilant as ever, and a shade less punctilious. They guarded him more alertly, searched his cabin with less suavity. Farr grew to hate their faces.

At Vhejanh he resigned his charter, flew back to Jhespiezan, booked passage to Earth on the Red Ball Packet *Queen of Denmark*.

During his last few days on Iszm the surveillance became so intense that Farr complained to the Earth Treaty Administrator, who promised to make inquiries. Farr called the next day at the Administrative Mansion, a massive and dignified house overhanging the central watercourse. The Administrator was a small erect man only formally cordial. He grudgingly asked Farr to lunch. They ate on a balcony, with boat-pods laden with fruit and flowers passing along the canal below.

"I called at the Szecr Central about your case," the Administrator told Farr. "They're ambiguous, which is unusual."

Farr confessed that he failed to understand.

"Apparently you were present when a company of Arcturians—"

"Thord."

The Administrator acknowledged the correction. "—when the Thord made a massive raid on Tjiere plantation."

"I was there. The Szecr dosed me with hypnotics, questioned me, sucked out everything I knew."

The Administrator nodded. "They have no special charge to bring against you; but, frankly, you've aroused their suspicion." He passed Farr a second cup of coffee, darting a curious glance at him as he did so. "I assume you're not guilty . . . But—perhaps there's something you know. Did you communicate with anyone they might suspect?"

Farr almost lost his temper. "Who are you representing? Me? Or the Szecr?"

The Administrator said coldly, "After all it's not impossible that you are what they seem to think you are."

"There's always the possibility I'm not!"

"Well," said the Administrator, "I only know what you've told me. I spoke to the Iszic Commandant. He is noncommittal. Perhaps they regard you as a dupe, a decoy, a messenger. They may be waiting for you to make a false move or lead them to someone who will."

"They'll have a long wait."

The Administrator shrugged. "I know very little of the case."

"I was at Tjiere during the raid," said Farr. "They dropped me into a cell with a Thord who killed himself. I'm still wearing scabs." He felt his scalp, where hair at last was beginning to grow. He looked around the balcony. "This place must be tapped for sound."

The Administrator nodded. "I have nothing to conceal; they can listen night and day. They probably do." He rose to his feet. "When does your ship leave?"

"In two or three days, depending on cargo."

"My advice is to tolerate the surveillance, make the best of it."

Farr extended his thanks and departed: The Szecr were waiting; they bowed politely as Farr stepped out into the street.

THE night before departure, a young Szecr approached Farr and with great punctilio delivered a message. "If Farr Sainh can spare the time, he is asked to call at the embarkation office."

"Very well," said Farr, resigning himself to the worst. He dispatched his luggage to the space-terminal, and presented himself at the embarkation office, expecting an examination to end all examinations.

The Szecr completely confounded him. He was conducted into the pod of the Szecr sub-commandant, who spoke bluntly and to the point.

"Farr Sainh—you may have sensed our interest during the last few weeks."

Farr muttered agreement.

"I may now divulge the background to the case," said the Szecr. "The surveillance was motivated by concern for your safety."

"Ha, ha! My Safety!"

"We suspect that you are in danger."

Somewhere a terrible mistake is being made, thought Farr. "But—may I ask —why?"

"I have been authorized to communicate only this warning."

"But—what are you warning me against?"

"The details will contribute nothing to your safety."

"But—I've done nothing!"

The Szecr sub-commandant twirled his viewer. "The universe is four billion years old, the last billion of which has produced intelligent life. During this time not one hour of absolute equity has prevailed. It should be no surprise to find this basic condition applying to your personal affairs."

"In other words—"

"In other words—tread soundlessly, look around corners, follow enticing females into no dark chambers." He plucked a taut string; a young Szecr appeared. "Conduct Aile Farr Sainh aboard the *Queen of Denmark;* we are waiving all further examinations."

Farr stared in disbelief.

"Yes, Farr Sainh," said the Szecr. "We feel you have demonstrated your honesty."

Farr left the pod in bewilderment. Something was wrong. The Iszic waived examination of no one and nothing.

Alone in his cubicle aboard the *Queen of Denmark*, he eased himself down on the elastic panel that served as his bed. He was in danger. The Szecr had said so. It was an unsettling idea. Farr had a normal quota of courage; fighting tangible enemies he would not disgrace himself. But to learn that his life might be taken, to be ignorant of the hows and whys and wherefores—it brought a queasy turmoil to his stomach . . . Of course, Farr reasoned, the Szecr sub-commandant might be in error; or he might have used the mysterious threat to speed Farr away from Iszm.

He rose to his feet, searched his cabin. He found no overt mechanisms, no spy-cells. He arranged his possessions in such a way that he would notice a disturbance; then, sliding aside the fiber panel, he looked out upon the catwalk. It was a ribbon of striated gray glass—empty. Farr stepped out, walked hurriedly to the lounge.

He examined the roster. There were eighteen passengers including himself. The names meant nothing: approximate renderings of alien phonemes.

Farr returned to his cabin, locked the door, lay down on the bed . . .

VI

NOT TILL the *Queen of Denmark* was space-borne and the Captain came to the lounge for the routine reading of ship's regulations did Farr see his fellow passengers. There were seven Iszic, five Earthers, a pair of Monasgqan-savants, three Codaini monks performing a ritual pilgrimage around the worlds. The Iszic were planter's agents, high-caste austere men, more or less of a type; Farr presumed that two or perhaps three were Szecr. The Earthers included a middle-aged missionary and his young wife, a pair of talkative young men touring the universe, and a grizzled power engineer on leave to Earth. The tall gray Codaini and the cherubic Monasgqans posed no threat. They had arrived on Iszum with the ship, and Farr left them out of his considerations. The five earthers appeared harmless. A Szecr had warned him of his danger; why should he expect harm from the Iszic? Why should he expect harm of anyone? He scratched his head in perplexity, disturbing the scab he still carried from his slide down the Tjiere root-tube.

The voyage became routine—steady identical hours broken by meals and sleep-periods at whatever rhythm the passenger chose. To while away the tedium, or perhaps because the tedium provided nothing else to think of, Farr began an innocent flirtation with Mrs. Anderview, the wife of the missionary, who was engrossed in writing a voluminous report. She was a graceful woman

with a rich mouth and a provocative half-smile. Farr's part in the affair extended no further than a frame of mind, a warmth of tone, a significant glance or two—a lukewarm matter at best. He was correspondingly surprised when Mrs. Anderview, whose first name he did not know, came quietly into his cabin one evening, smiling with a kind of shy recklessness.

Farr sat up blinking.

"May I come in?"

"You're already in."

Mrs. Anderview nodded slowly and slid the panel shut behind her. Farr noticed suddenly that she was far prettier than he had let himself observe, that she wore a perfume of indefinable sweetness: aloes, cardamon, limone.

She sat beside him. "I grow so bored," she complained. "Night after night Merrit writes, it's always the same. He thinks of nothing but his budget. And I—I like fun."

The invitation could hardly have been more exact. Farr examined first one side of the situation then the other. He cleared his throat, while Mrs. Anderview, blushing a little, watched him.

There was a rap at the door. Farr jumped to his feet, as if he were already guilty. He eased the panel open. Waiting outside was one of the Iszic, a man by the name of Omon Bozhd, a dealer's agent bound for Earth.

"Farr Sainh, may I consult you for a moment? I would consider it a great favor."

"Well," said Farr, "I'm busy right now."

"The matter transcends business."

Farr turned to the woman. "Just a minute; I'll be right back."

"Hurry!" She seemed very impatient; Farr looked at her in surprise, started to speak.

"Sh," she warned him. Farr shrugged, stepped out into the corridor.

"What's the trouble?" he asked Omon Bozhd.

"Farr Sainh—would you like to save your life?"

"I'd like it fine," said Farr, "but—"

"Invite me into your cabin." Omon Bozhd took a step forward.

"There's hardly room," said Farr. "And anyway—"

The Iszic said earnestly, "You understand the pattern, do you not?"

"No," said Farr. "I'd like to—but I'm afraid I don't."

Omon Bozhd nodded. "Your gallantry must be forgotten. Let us enter your cabin; there is not much time." He slid back the panel, stepped through. Farr followed, sure he was a fool, but not sure exactly what kind of fool.

Mrs. Merritt Anderview jumped to her feet. "Oh," she gasped, flushing. "Mr. Farr!"

FARR held out his hands helplessly. Mrs. Anderview started to march from the cabin; Omon Bozhd stood in her way. He grinned; his pale mouth split, showing his gray palate, his arch of pointed teeth.

"Please, Mrs. Anderview, do not leave; your reputation is safe."

"I have no time to waste," she said sharply. Farr saw suddenly that she was not pretty, that her face was pinched, her eyes angry and selfish.

"Please," said Omon Bozhd, "not just yet. Sit down, if you will."

A rap-rap on the door. A voice hoarse with fury. "Open up, open up in there!"

"Certainly," said Omon Bozhd. He flung the panel wide. Anderview stood framed in the opening, the whites of his eyes showing. He held a shatter-gun, his hand was trembling. He saw Omon Bozhd; his shoulders sagged, his jaw slackened.

"Excuse me for not asking you in," said Farr. "We're a little crowded."

Anderview reorganized his passion. "What's going on in here!"

Mrs. Anderview pushed out upon the catwalk. "Nothing," she said in a throaty voice. "Nothing at all." She swept down the corridor.

In a negligent voice Omon Bozhd spoke to Anderview. "There is nothing for you here. Perhaps you had better join your lady."

Anderview slowly turned on his heel, departed.

Farr felt weak in the knees. Here were depths he could not fathom, whorls of motive and purpose . . . He sank down on the bunk, burning at the thought of how he had been played for a sucker.

"An excellent pretext for expunging a man," remarked the Iszic. "At least in the framework of Earth institutions."

Farr glanced up sharply, detecting a sardonic flavor to the remark. He said grudgingly, "I guess you saved my hide—two or three square feet of it, anyway."

Omon Bozhd moved his hand, gesturing with a non-existant viewer. "A trifle."

"Not to me," Farr growled. "I like my hide."

The Iszic turned to go.

"Just a minute," said Farr. He rose to his feet. "I want to know what's going on."

"The matter is surely self-explanatory?"

"Maybe I'm stupid."

The Iszic examined him thoughtfully. "Perhaps you're too close to the situation to see it in its whole."

"You're of the Szecr?" asked Farr.

"Every foreign agent is of the Szecr."

"Well, what's going on? Why are the Anderviews after me?"

"They've weighed you, balanced your usefulness against the danger you represent."

"This is absolutely fantastic!"

OMON BOZHD focussed both fractions of his eyes on Farr. He spoke in a reflective key. "Every second of existence is a new miracle. Consider the countless variations and possibilities that await us every second—avenues into the future. We take only one of these; the others—who knows where they go? This is the eternal marvel, the magnificent uncertainty of the second next to come, with the past a steady unfolding carpet of denouement—"

"Yes, yes," said Farr.

"Our minds become numbed to the wonder of life, because of its very pressure and magnitude." Omon Bozhd at last took his eyes off Farr. "In such a perspective this affair has intrinsic interest no more or less than taking a single breath."

Farr said in a stiff voice, "It interests me considerably, and now, without your dialectical smokescreen—"

Omon Bozhd swung his absent viewer. "I will bid you good night."

"Go to hell."

The Iszic left the cabin. Farr sat for five minutes. He rose to his feet, slid open the door, looked along the catwalk. To right and left glimmered the gray glass ribbon. Overhead a similar ribbon gave access to the cabins next above. Farr quietly left the cabin, slid the panel shut, walked on the balls of his feet to the end of the catwalk, looked through the arch into the lounge. The two young tourists, the engineer, a pair of Iszic were playing poker. The Iszic were ahead of the game, with one fraction of their eyes focussed on the cards, the other on the faces of their opponents.

Farr turned back, climbed the ladder to the upper deck. There was silence except for the normal half-heard sounds of the ship—sigh of pumps, murmur of circulating air, subdued mutter from the lounge.

Farr found the door with a placard reading *Merrit and Anthea Anderview.* He hesitated, listening. He heard nothing, no sounds, no voices. He put his hand out to knock, paused. He recollected Omon Bozhd's dissertation on life, the infinity of avenues to the future . . . He could knock, he could return to his cabin. He threw caution to the winds, knocked.

No one answered. Farr looked up and down the catwalk. He could still return to his cabin. He tried the door. It opened. The room was dark. Farr put his elbow to the molding; light filled the room. Merrit Anderview, sitting stiffly in a chair, looked at him with a wide fearless gaze.

Farr saw he was dead. Anthea Anderview lay in the lower bunk, relaxed and quite composed.

Farr made no close inspection, but she was dead too. A shatter-gun vibrating at low intensity had homogenized their brains; their thoughts and memories were brown melange; their chosen avenues into the future had come to a break. Farr stood still. He tried to hold his breath, but he knew the damage had already been done. He backed out, closed the door. The stewards would presently find the bodies . . . In the meantime—Farr considered with growing uneasiness. He might have been observed. His stupid flirtation with Anthea Anderview might be common knowledge; perhaps even the argument with Merrit Anderview. His presence in the cabin could be easily established; there would be a film of his exhalations on every object in the room. This constituted positive identification in the courtrooms, if it could be shown that no other person aboard the ship fell into his exhalation group.

Farr turned. He left the cabin, crossed the lounge. No one appeared to observe him. He climbed the ladder to the bridge, knocked at the door of the captain's cabin.

CAPTAIN DORRISTY slid the panel back—a stocky taciturn man with squinting black eyes. Behind Dorristy stood Omon Bozhd. Farr thought that his cheek muscles tightened; that his hand gave a jerk as if he were twirling his viewer.

Farr felt suddenly at ease. He had rolled with whatever punch Omon Bozhd was trying to deliver. "Two passengers are dead—the Anderviewers."

Omon Bozhd turned both eye-fractions on him: cold animosity.

"That's interesting," said Dorristy. "Come in."

Farr stepped through the door. Omon Bozhd looked away.

Dorristy said in a soft voice, "Bozhd here tells me that you killed the Anderviews."

Farr turned to look at the Iszic. "He's probably the most plausible liar on the ship. He did it himself."

Dorristy grinned, looking from one to the other. "He says you were after the woman."

"I was politely attentive. This is a dull trip. Up to now."

Dorristy looked at the Iszic. "What do you say, Omon Bozhd?"

The Iszic swung his non-existent viewer. "Something more than politeness brought Mrs. Anderview to Farr's cabin."

Farr checked his anger, turned to the Captain. "Do you believe him?"

Dorristy grinned sourly. "I don't believe anyone."

"This is what happened. It's hard to believe but it's true." Farr told his story. "—after Bozhd left, I got thinking. I was going to get to the bottom of it, one way or the other. I went to the Anderview's cabin. I opened the door, saw they were dead; I came here at once."

Dorristy said nothing, but now he was examining Omon Bozhd rather than Farr. At last he shrugged. "I'll seal the room; you can sweat it out when we get to Earth."

Omon Bozhd obscured the lower half of his eyes. He swung the absent viewer nonchalantly. "I have heard Farr's story," he said in a thoughtful voice. "He impresses me with his frankness. I believe I am mistaken; it is not likely that he performed the crime. I retract my accusation." He stalked from the cabin. Farr gazed after him in angry triumph.

Dorristy looked at Farr. "You didn't kill them, eh?"

Farr snorted.

Dorristy nodded, spoke gruffly from the side of his mouth, "Well—we'll see when we put down at Barstow." He glanced sidewise at Farr. "I'll take it as a favor if you keep this matter quiet. Don't discuss it with anyone."

"I didn't intend to," said Farr shortly.

VII

THE bodies were photographed and removed to cold storage; the cabin

was sealed. The ship buzzed with rumor; Farr found the Anderviews a difficult topic to avoid.

Earth grew closer. Farr felt no great apprehension, but there was the uncertainty, the underlying mystery: why had the Anderviews waylaid him in the first place? Would he run into further danger on Earth? Farr became angry. These intrigues were no concern of his; he wanted no part of them. But an imponderable bulk of certainty kept pushing up from his subconscious: he was involved, however bitterly he rejected the idea. He had other things to do—his job, his thesis, the compilation of a stereo which he hoped to sell to one of the broadcast networks.

And there was something else, a curious urgency, a pressure, something to be done. It came at odd moments to trouble Farr—a dissatisfaction, like an unresolved chord in some deep chamber of his mind. It had no direct connection with the Anderviews and their murderer, no link with anything. It was something to be done, something he had forgotten . . . or never known. . . .

Omon Bozhd spoke to him only once, approaching him in the lounge. He said in an offhand voice, "You are now aware of the threat you face. On Earth I may be unable to help you."

Farr's resentment had not diminished. He said, "On Earth you'll probably be executed for murder."

"No, Aile Farr Sainh, it will not be proved against me."

Farr examined the pale narrow face. Iszic and Earther—evolved from different stock to the same humanoid approximation; simian, amphibian—there would never be a rapport or sympathy between the races. Farr asked curiously, "You didn't kill them?"

"Certainly it is unnecessary to iterate the obvious to a man of Aile Farr's intelligence."

"Go ahead, iterate it. Reiterate it. I'm stupid. Did you kill them?"

"No. Of course not. It is the last thing I would do."

"But—why did you try to pin it on me? You know I didn't do it. What have you got against me?"

Omon Bozhd smiled thinly. "Nothing. The crime, if crime it was, could never be proved against you. The investigation would delay you two or three days, and allow other matters to mature."

"Why did you retract your accusation?"

"I saw I had made a mistake. I am human—far from infallible."

Sudden anger threatened to choke Farr. "Why don't you stop talking in hints and implications? If you've got something to say—*say it!*"

"Farr Sainh is himself pressing the matter. I have nothing to say. The message I had for him I delivered; he would not expect me to lay bare my soul."

Farr nodded, grinned. "One thing you can be sure of—if I see a chance to spike the game you're playing—I'll take it."

"I am a businessman," said the Iszic. "I play no games."

Every hour the star that was Home Sun brightened; every hour Earth was closer. Farr found himself unable to sleep. A sour lump formed in his stomach. Resentment, perplexity, impatience compounded into a malaise whose effects were physical. In addition, his scalp had never healed properly; it itched and smarted; he suspected that he had contracted an Izcic infection. The prospect alarmed him; he pictured the infection spreading, his hair falling out, his scalp bleaching to the watered-milk color of the Iszic skin. Nor did the mysterious inner urgency diminish. He sought through his mind; he reviewed the days and months, he made notes and outlines, synthesized and checked without satisfaction; he bundled the whole problem, all the notes and papers, into an angry ball and cast it aside.

And at last, after the longest, most exasperating voyage Farr had ever made, the *Queen of Denmark* drifted into the Solar System. . . .

SUN, Earth, the Moon: an archipelago of bright round islands, after a long passage through a dark sea. Sun

drifted off to one side, Moon slipped away to the other. Earth expanded ahead: gray, green, tan, white, blue; full of clouds and winds, sunburn, frosts, draughts, chills and dusts; the naval of the universe, the depot, terminal, clearing-house, which the outer races visited as provincials.

It was at midnight when the hull of the *Queen of Denmark* touched Earth. The generators sang down out of inaudibility, down through shrillness, through treble, tenor, baritone, bass, and once more out of hearing.

The passengers watched in the saloon, with the Anderviews like holes in a jaw from which teeth had been pulled. Everyone was taut and apprehensive, sitting forward in their seats, standing stiffly.

The pumps hissed, adjusting to the outer atmosphere; lights glared in through the ports. The entrance clanged open; there was a murmur of voices; Captain Dorristy ushered in a tall man with blunt intelligent features, cropped hair, dark-brown skin.

"This is Detective Inspector Kirdy of the Special Squad," said Dorristy. "He will investigate the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Anderview. Please give him your co-operation; we'll all be at liberty the sooner."

No one spoke. The Iszic stood like statues of ice to one side. In deference to Earth convention they wore trousers and capes; their attitude conveyed suspicion, distrust; as if even on Earth they would be required to protect their secrets.

Three subordinate detectives entered the room, stared around curiously, and the tautness in the room increased.

Inspector Kirdy spoke in a pleasant voice, "I'll delay you as little as possible. I'd like to speak to Mr. Omon Bozhd."

Omon Bozhd inspected Kirdy through the viewer, which he now carried, but Detective Inspector Kirdy's right shoulder blazed into no banner of various lights; he had never visited Iszm; he had never ventured past Moon.

Omon Bozhd stepped forward. "I am Omon Bozhd."

Kirdy took him to the Captain's cabin. Ten minutes passed. An assistant appeared in the door. "Mr. Aile Farr."

Farr rose to his feet, followed the assistant from the saloon.

Kirdy and Omon Bozhd faced each other, a study in contrasts; the one pale, austere, aquiline; the other dark, warm, blunt.

Kirdy said to Farr, "I'd like you to listen to Mr. Bozhd's story, tell me what you think of it." He turned to the Iszic. "Would you be kind enough to repeat your statement?"

"In essence," said Omon Bozhd, "the situation is this. Even before leaving Jhespiezan I had reason to suspect that the Anderviews were planning harm to Farr Smith. I communicated my suspicions to my friends—"

"The other Iszic gentlemen?" asked Kirdy.

"Exactly. With their help I installed an inspection-cell in the Anderview's cabin. My fears were justified. They returned to their cabin, and here they themselves were killed. In my cabin I witnessed the occurrence. Farr Sainh of course had no part in the matter. He was—and is—completely innocent."

EVERYONE scrutinized Farr. Farr scowled. Was he so obviously ingenious, so undiscerning?

Omon Bozhd turned a fraction of his eyes back to Kirdy. "Farr, as I say, was innocent. But I considered it wise to have him confined away from further danger, so I falsely accused him. Farr Sainh, understandably, refused to cooperate, and forestalled me. My accusation was arousing no conviction in Captain Dorristy, so I withdrew it."

Kirdy turned to Farr. "What do you say to all this, Mr. Farr? Do you still believe Mr. Bozhd to be the murderer?"

Farr struggled with his anger. "No," he said between his teeth. "His story is so—so utterly fantastic that I suppose it's the truth." He looked at Omon Bozhd. "Why don't you talk? You say you saw the whole thing. Who did the killing?"

Omon Bozhd swung his viewer. "I have glanced over your laws of criminal procedure. My accusation would carry no great weight; the authorities would need corroborative evidence. That evidence exists. If and when you find it, my statement becomes unnecessary."

Kirdy turned to his assistant. "Take skin-scrapings, breath and perspiration samples of all the passengers."

After the samples were collected, Kirdy stepped into the saloon and made a statement. "I will question you separately. Your answers will be compared to your cephaloscope responses. I remind you that cephaloscope evidence can not be introduced in court to prove guilt—only to prove innocence. Therefore, if innocent, you have nothing to fear; the cephaloscope at worst can only fail to eliminate you from the suspects."

The interrogations lasted three hours. First to be queried were the Iszic. They left the saloon one at a time, returning with identical expressions of bored patience. The Codaini were taken next, then the Monasqans; then Farr, then the engineer. The two young space-travellers remained. They had displayed increasing nervousness, laughing, making jokes, cracking their knuckles.

Detective Inspector Kirdy accompanied the engineer back into the lounge. "So far," he said, "the cephaloscope has cleared everyone I have interviewed. The breath components of no one I have interviewed match the film detected on the wrist-band worn by Mrs. Anderview."

Everyone in the room stirred. Eyes wandered to the two young tourists who went white and red by turns.

"Will you two gentlemen come with me?" asked Kirdy politely.

They took short steps forward, looked left and right, then preceded Kirdy into the Captain's cabin.

Five minutes passed. Kirdy's assistant appeared in the lounge. "We are sorry to have kept you waiting. You are all at liberty to debark."

There was talk around the lounge—a sputter and hum. An angry pressure overpowered Farr.

He strode across the lounge, climbed the steps to the Captain's cabin.

Kirdy's assistant stopped him. "Excuse me, Mr. Farr. I don't think you'd better interrupt."

"I don't care what you think," said Farr. He yanked at the door. It was locked. He rapped. Captain Dorristy slid it open a foot, pushed his square face out. "Well? What's the trouble?"

Farr put his hand on Dorristy's face, pushed him back. He felt Dorristy's features squirming in outrage. He thrust open the door, stepped inside.

DORRISTY had already started a punch for Farr's face. Farr would have welcomed it as an excuse to strike back, to smash, to hurt. But one of the assistants stepped between.

Kirdy stood facing the two young travellers. He turned his head. "Yes, Mr. Farr?"

Dorristy, seething, muttering, red in the face, stood back.

Farr said, "These two—they're guilty?"

Kirdy nodded. "The evidence is conclusive."

Farr looked at the two young men. Their faces blurred and swam before his eyes. Their good-humor and sophistication was the facade for cruelty and callousness. Farr wondered how he could have been deceived. He bent a little forward; they met his eyes with defiance and dislike.

"Why?" he asked. "Why did all this happen?"

They made no answer.

"I've got a right to know," said Farr. He felt a despairing certainty; now he'd never be sure. He asked humbly, "Won't you please tell me?"

They looked at each other, shrugged, laughed foolishly.

Farr pled with them. "Is it something I know? Something I've seen? Something I have?"

An emotion close to hysteria gripped the two young men. One said, "We just don't like the way your hair is parted." They laughed till the tears came.

Kirdy said grimly, "I haven't got any better from them."

"What could be their motive?" asked Farr plaintively. "Their reason? Why would the Anderviews want to kill me?"

"If I find out I'll let you know," said Kirdy. "Meanwhile—where can I get in touch with you?"

Farr considered. There was something he had to do . . . It would come to him, but in the meantime. "I'm going to Los Angeles. I'll be at the Hotel Imperador."

"Sucker!" said one of the young murderers under his breath.

Farr took a half-step forward. "Easy, Mr. Farr," said Kirdy.

Farr turned away.

"I'll let you know," said Kirdy.

Farr looked at Dorristy. Dorristy said, "Never mind. Don't bother to apologize. I know how you feel."

VIII

WHEN Farr returned to the lounge, the other passengers had debarked and were passing through the immigration office. Farr hurriedly followed them out, almost in claustrophobic panic. The *Queen of Denmark,* the magnificent bird of space, enclosed him like a clamp, a coffin; he could wait no longer to leave, to stand on the soil of Earth.

It was almost morning. The wind off the Mojave blew in his face, aromatic with sage and desert dust: the stars glinted, paling in the east. Farr walked down the ramp, planted his foot on the ground. He was back on Earth. The impact seemed to jar an idea into his head. Of course, he thought, the natural thing to do, the obvious man to see: K. Penche.

Tomorrow. First to the Hotel Imperador. A bath in a hundred gallons of hot water. A hundred gallons of Scotch for a nightcap. Then bed.

He passed immigration quickly, dispatched his luggage to the Imperador. By-passing the line of helicabs, he stepped down the shaft to the public tube. The disk appeared under his feet (always a thrill in the shaft, always the thought: suppose the disk doesn't come? Just this once?)

The disk slowed to a stop. Farr paid his fare, called a one-man car to the dock, jumped in, dialled his destination, relaxed into the seat. He could not marshal his thoughts. Visions seeped through his mind: the regions of space, Iszm, Jhespiezan, the many-podded houses. He sailed in the *Lhaiz* to Tjiere atoll; he felt the terror of the raid on the fields of Zhde Patasz. The visions passed; they were a memory, far away, farther than the light years to Iszm.

The hum of the car soothed him; his eyes grew heavy; he started to doze.

He pulled himself awake. Shadowy, phantasmagorical, this whole affair. But it was real. His danger was real. Farr forced himself into a sober frame of mind. But his mind refused to reason, to plan. The stimuli had lost their sting. Here in the tube, the sane normal underground tube, murder seemed impossible. . . .

One man on Earth could help him: K. Penche, Earth agent for the Iszic houses, the man to whom Omon Bozhd brought bad news.

The car vibrated, jerked, shunted off the main tube toward the ocean. It twisted twice more, threading the maze of local tubes, and coasted finally to a stop.

The door snapped open, a uniformed attendant assisted him to the deck. He registered at a stereoscreen booth; an elevator lofted him two hundred feet to the surface, another five hundred feet to his room level. He was shown into a long chamber, finished in pleasant tones of olive green, straw, russet and white. One wall was sheer glass looking over Santa Monica, Beverly Hills and the ocean. Farr sighed in content. Iszic houses in many ways were remarkable, but never would they supersede Hotel Imperador.

Farr took his bath, floating in hot water faintly scented with lime. Rhythmical fingers of cooler water jetted and surged, massaging his legs, back, ribs,

shoulders . . . He almost fell asleep. The bottom of the tub elevated, angled gently to vertical, set him on his feet. Sunlamp radiation gave him a quick pleasant scorch; blasts of air removed his wetness.

He came out of the bath to find Scotch and soda waiting for him; not a hundred gallons, but enough. He stood at the window, sipping, enjoying the sense of utter fatigue.

The sun came up, golden light washed in like a tide across the vast reaches of the world-city. Somewhere out there, in the luxury district that had once been Signal Hill, dwelt K. Penche. Farr felt an instant of puzzlement. Strange, he thought, how Penche represented the solution to everything. Well, he'd know whether that was right or not when he saw the man.

Farr polarized the window, light died from the room. He set the wall clock to call him at noon, sank into bed, and fell asleep.

THE window depolarized, and daylight entered the room. Farr awoke, sat up in bed, reached for a menu. He ticked off coffee, grapefruit, bacon, eggs, jumped out of bed, went to the window. The world's largest city spread as far as he could see, white spires melting into the tawny haze, everywhere a trembling and vibration of commerce and life.

The wall extruded a table set with his breakfast; Farr turned away from the window, seated himself, ate and watched news on the stereoscreen. For a minute he forgot his troubles; after a year's absence, he had lost the continuity of the news. Events which he might have overlooked a year ago suddenly seemed interesting. He felt a cheerful flush; it was good to be home on Earth.

The news-screen voice said, "Now for some flashes from outer space. It has just been learned that aboard the Red Ball Packet *Queen of Denmark* two passengers, ostensibly missionaries returning from service in the Mottram Group—"

Farr watched, his breakfast forgotten, the cheerful glow fading.

The voice recounted the affair; the screen modelled the *Queen of Denmark:* first the exterior, then a cutaway, with an arrow directing attention to "the death cabin." How pleasant and unconcerned was this commentator! How remote and incidental he made the affair seem!

"—the two victims and the two murderers have both been identified as members of the notorious Heavy Weather crime-syndicate; apparently they had visited Iszm, third planet of Eta Ophiuchi, in an attempt to smuggle out a female house."

The voice spoke on. Simulacra of the Anderviews, of Brunn and Gonsalve, the two young tourists appeared.

Farr clicked off the screen, pushed the table back into the wall. He rose to his feet, went to look out over the city. It was urgent. He must see Penche.

From the Size 2 cupboard he selected underwear, a suit of pale blue fiber, fresh sandals. As he dressed he planned out his day. First, of course, Penche . . . Farr frowned, paused in the buckling of his sandals. What should he tell Penche? Come to think of it, why would Penche worry about his troubles? What could Penche do? He was by no means God Almighty; his monopoly stemmed from the Iszic; he would hardly risk antagonizing them.

Farr took a deep breath, shrugged aside these annoying speculations. It was illogical, but quite definitely the right place to go. He was sure of this; he felt it in his bones.

He finished dressing, went to the stereoscreen dialled the office of K. Penche. Penche's symbol appeared—a conventionalized Iszic house, with vertical bars of heavy type, reading, *K. Penche—Houses.* Farr had not touched the scanning button; and his own image did not cross to Penche's office, an act of instinctive caution.

A female voice said, "K Penche Enterprises."

"This is—" Farr hestitated, combined

the names of the two miserable young murderers "—this is Brunn Gonsalve. I want to see Mr. Penche."

"What is your business, please?"

"It's personal."

"I'll connect you to Mr. Penche's secretary."

The secretary's image appeared—a young woman of languid charm. Farr made his request. The secretary looked at the screen. "Send over your image, please."

"No," said Farr. "Connect me with Mr. Penche—I'll talk directly to him."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," said the secretary. "Quite contrary to our office procedure."

"Give Mr. Penche my name. Mention that I have just arrived from Iszm on the *Queen of Denmark.*"

The secretary turned, spoke into a mesh. After a second her face melted, the screen filled with the face of K. Penche. It was a massive powerful face, like a piece of heavy machinery. The eyes burnt from deep rectangular sockets, bars of muscles clamped his mouth. The eyebrows rose in a sardonic arch; the expression was neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

"Who's speaking?" asked K. Penche.

WORDS rose up through Farr's brain like bubbles from the bottom of a dark vat. They were words he had never intended to say. "I've come from Iszm; I've got it." Farr heard himself in amazement. The words came again. "I've come from Iszm. . . ." He clamped his teeth, refused to vocalize; the syllables bounced back from the barrier.

"Who is this? Where are you?"

Farr reached over, turned off the screen, sank weakly back into his chair. What was going on? He had nothing for Penche! 'Nothing' meant a female house, naturally. Farr might be naive; but not to that degree. He had no house—seed, seedling or sapling.

Why did he want to see Penche? Pent-up common-sense broke through to the top of his mind. Penche couldn't help him . . . a voice from another part of his brain said, Penche knows the ropes; he'll give you good advice . . . well, yes, thought Farr. This might be true enough.

Farr relaxed; yes, of course—that was his motive. But on the other hand—Penche was a businessman, dependent on the Iszic. If Farr were to go to anyone it should be to the police, to the Special Squad.

He sat back rubbing his chin. Of course, it wouldn't hurt to see the man; maybe get it off his chest.

Farr jumped to his feet in disgust. It was unreasonable. Why should he see Penche? Give him just one good reason . . . There was no reason whatever. He came to a definite decision: he would have nothing to with Penche.

He left his room, descended to the main lobby of the Imperador, crossed to the desk to cash a bank coupon. The coupon was screened to the bank; there would be a wait of a few seconds. Farr tapped his fingers on the counter impatiently. Beside him a burly chisel-faced man argued with the clerk. He wanted to deliver a message to a guest, but the clerk was skeptical. The burly man began to bite off his words in anger; the clerk stood behind his glass bulwark, prim, fastidious, shaking his head. Serene in the strength given him by rules and regulations, he took pleasure in thwarting the large man.

"If you don't know his name, how do you know he's at the Imperador?"

"I know he's here," said the large man. "He came in early this morning. It's important that he get this message."

"It sounds very odd," mused the clerk. "You don't know what he looks like, you don't know his name . . . You might easily deliver your message to the wrong party."

"That's my look-out!"

The clerk smilingly shook his head. "Apparently all you know is that he arrived at five this morning. We have several guests who came in at that time."

Farr was counting his money; the conversation impinged on his conscious-

ness. He loitered, adjusting the bills in his wallet.

"This man came in from space. He was just off the *Queen of Denmark*. Now do you know who I mean?"

Farr moved away quietly. He knew quite clearly what had happened. Penche had been expecting the call; it was important to him. He had traced the connection to the Imperador, and had sent a man over to contact him. In a far corner of the room he watched the large man lurch away from the desk in rage. Farr knew he would try elsewhere. The chief deck-steward would get him his information for a fee.

Farr started out the door, turned to look back. A nondescript middle-aged woman was walking toward him; he happened to meet her eyes, she looked aside, faltered the smallest trifle in her step. Farr had already been keyed to suspicion, or he might not have noticed. The woman walked quickly past him, stepped on the exit-band, was carried through the Imperador orchid garden and out upon Sunset Boulevard.

Farr followed, watched her melt into the crowds. He crossed to a traffic umbrella, took the lift to the helicab deck. A cab stood empty beside the shelter. Farr jumped in, picked a destination at random. "Laguna Beach."

The cab rose into the southbound level. Farr watched from the rear port. A cab bobbed up a hundred yards astern, followed.

Farr called to the driver, "Turn off to Riverside."

The cab behind turned.

Farr told his driver, "Put me down right here."

"South Gate?" asked the driver, as if Farr were not in his right mind.

"South Gate." Not too far from Penche's office and display yard on Signal Hill, thought Farr. Coincidence.

THE cab dropped him to the surface. Farr watched the pursuing cab descend. He felt no great concern. Evading a pursuer was a matter of utmost simplicity. A technique known to every child who watched the stereos.

Farr followed the white arrow to the underground shaft, stepped in. The disk caught him, bumped to a gentle halt. Farr called over a car, jumped in. The underground was almost made to order for shaking off a shadow. He dialed a destination, tried to relax into the seat.

The car accelerated, hummed, decelerated, halted. The door snapped open. Farr jumped out, rode the lift to the surface. He froze in his tracks. What was he doing here? This was Signal Hill—once spiked with oil derricks, now lost under billows of exotic greenery: ten million trees, bushes, shrubs, merging around mansions and palaces. There were pools and waterfalls, carefully informal banks of flowers: scarlet hibiscus, blazing yellow banneret, sapphire gardenia. The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were as nothing; Nebuchadnezzar would have eaten his grass in envy. Old Bel-Air was frowzy in contrast; Topanga was for the parvenus.

IX

K. PENCHE owned twenty acres on the summit of Signal Hill. He had cleared off his land, ignoring protests and court orders, winning law-suits. Signal Hill now was crowned by Iszic tree houses: sixteen varieties in four basic types; the only models Penche was allowed to sell.

Farr walked slowly along the shaded arcade that once had been Atlantic Avenue. Interesting, he thought, that coincidence should bring him here. Well, he was this close; perhaps it might be a good idea to see Penche. . . .

No! said Farr stubbornly. He had made the decision; no irrational compulsion was going to make him change his mind! An odd matter, that in all the vast reaches of Greater Los Angeles, he should wind up almost at K. Penche's front door. Too odd; it went beyond mere chance. His subconscious must be at work.

He glanced behind him. No one could possibly be following, but he watched

for a moment or two as hundreds of people, old and young, of all shapes, sizes and colors passed. By a subtle evaluation he fixed on a slender man in a gray suit; he struck a false note. Farr reversed his direction, threaded the maze of open-air shops and booths under the arcade, ducked into a palm-shaded cafeteria, stepped out of sight behind a wall of leaves.

A minute passed. The man in the gray suit came briskly past. Farr stepped out, stared hard into the well-groomed, well-pomaded countenance. "Are you looking for me, mister?"

"Why no," said the man in the gray suit. "I've never seen you before in my life."

"I hope I don't see you again," said Farr. He left the cafeteria, stalked to the nearest underground station, dropped down the shaft, jumped into a car. After a minute's thought he dialled Altadena. The car hummed off. No easy relaxation now; Farr sat on the edge of his seat. How had they located him? Through the tube? It seemed incredible.

To make doubly sure, he cancelled Altadena, dialled Pomona.

Five minutes later he wandered with apparent casualness along Valley Boulevard. In another five minutes he located the shadow, a young workman with a vacant face. Am I crazy? Farr asked himself; am I developing a persecution complex? He put the shadow to a rigorous test, strolling around blocks as if looking for a particular house. The young workman ambled along behind him.

Farr went in a restaurant, called Special Squad on the stereo-screen. He asked for and was connected with Detective-Inspector Kirdy.

KIRDY greeted him politely, and positively denied that he had assigned men to follow Farr. He appeared keenly interested. "Wait just a shake," he said, "I'll check the other departments."

Three or four minutes passed. Farr saw the blank young man enter the restaurant, take an unobtrusive seat, order coffee.

Kirdy returned. "We're all clean around here. Perhaps it's a private agency."

Farr looked annoyed. "Isn't there anything I can do about it?"

"Are you being molested in any way?"

"No."

"We really can't do anything. Drop into a tube, shake 'em off."

"I've taken the tube twice—they're still after me."

Kirdy looked puzzled. "I wish they'd tell me how. We don't try to follow suspects any more; they brush us off too easily."

"I'll try once more," said Farr. "Then there'll be fireworks."

He marched out of the restaurant. The young workman downed his coffee, came quickly after.

Farr dropped down a tube. He waited, but the young workman did not follow. So much for that. He called over a car, looked around. The young workman was nowhere near. No one was near. Farr jumped in, dialled for Ventura. The car sped off. There was no conceivable way it could be traced or followed through the tubes.

In Ventura his shadow was an attractive young housewife who seemed out for an afternoon's shopping.

Farr jumped into a shaft, took a car for Long Beach. The man who followed him in Long Beach was the slender man in the gray suit who had first attracted his attention at Signal Hill. He seemed unperturbed when Farr recognized him; shrugging rather insolently, as if to say, "What do you expect?"

Signal Hill. Back again; only a mile or two away. Maybe, it might be a good idea after all to drop in on Penche.

No!

Farr sat down at an arcade cafe in full view of the shadow and ordered a sandwich. The man in the natty gray suit took a table nearby and provided himself with iced tea. Farr wished he could beat the truth out of the well-

groomed face. Inadvisable; he would end up in jail. Was Penche responsible for this persecution? Farr reluctantly rejected the idea. Penche's man had arrived at the Imperador desk while Farr was leaving. The evasion had been decisive there.

Who then? Omon Bozhd?

Farr sat stock-still; then laughed—a loud clear sharp bark of a laugh. People looked at him in surprise. The gray man gave him a glance of cautious appraisal. Farr continued to chuckle, a nervous release. Once he thought about it, it was so clear, so simple.

He looked up at the ceiling of the arcade, imagining the sky beyond. Somewhere, five or ten miles overhead, hung an air-boat. In the air-boat sat an Iszic, with a sensitive viewer and a radio. Everywhere that Farr went, the radiant in his right shoulder sent up a signal. In the viewer-screen, Farr was as surreptitious as a lighthouse.

He went to the stereo-screen, called Kirdy.

Kirdy was vastly interested. "I've heard of that stuff. Apparently it works."

"Yes," said Farr, "it works. How can I shield it?"

"Just a mniute." Five minutes passed. Kirdy came back to the screen. "Stay where you are; I'll send a man down with a shield."

The messenger presently arrived. Farr went into the men's room and wrapped a pad of woven metal around his shoulder and chest.

"Now," said Farr grimly. "Now we'll see."

The slim man in the gray suit followed him nonchalantly to the tube shaft. Farr dialed to Santa Monica.

He rose to the surface at the Ocean Avenue station, walked north-east along Wilshire Boulevard, back toward Beverly Hills. He was alone. He made all the tests he could think of. No one followed him. Farr grinned in satisfaction, picturing the annoyed Iszic at the viewer-screen.

He came to the Capricorn Club—a large, rather disreputable-looking saloon, with a pleasant old-fashioned odor of sawdust, wax and beer. He turned in, went directly to the stereo-screen, called the Hotel Imperador. Yes, there was a message for him. The clerk played back the tape.

X

FOR the second time Farr looked into Penche's massive sardonic face. The harsh deep voice was conciliatory; the words had been carefully chosen and rehearsed. "I'd like to see you at your earliest convenience, Mr. Farr. We both realize the need for discretion. I'm sure your visit will result in profit for both of us. I will be waiting for your call."

The stereo faded; the clerk appeared. "Shall I cancel or file, Mr. Farr?"

"Cancel," said Farr. He left the booth, went to the far end of the bar. The bartender made the traditional inquiry: "What's yours, brother?"

Farr ordered. "Beer—Vienna Stadtbrau."

The bartender turned, spun a tall oak wheel twined with hop vines, gay with labels. A hundred and twenty positions controlled a hundred and twenty storage-tubes. He pushed the bumper; a dark flask slipped out of the dispenser. The bartender squeezed the flask into a stein, set it before Farr. Farr took a deep swallow, relaxed, rubbed his forehead.

He was puzzled. Something very odd was going on; no question about it. Penche seemed reasonable enough. Perhaps, after all, it might be a good idea—wearily Farr put the thought away. Amazing how many guises the compulsion found to clothe itself. It was difficult to guard against them all. Unless he vetoed out of hand any course of action that included a visit to Penche. A protean measure, a counter-compulsion that also set shackles on his freedom of action. It was a mess. How could a man think clearly when he could not distinguish between an idiotic subconscious urge and common sense?

Farr ordered more beer; the bar-

tender, a sturdy, apple-cheeked little man with pop-eyes and a fine black mustache, obliged. Farr returned to his thinking. It was an interesting psychological problem, one that Farr might have relished in different circumstances. Right now it was too close to home. He tried to reason with the compulsion. What do I gain by seeing Penche? Penche had hinted of profit. He clearly thought that Farr had something he wanted.

It could only be a female house.

Farr had no female house; therefore—it was as simple as that—he gained nothing by going to Penche.

But Farr was disatisfied. The syllogism was too pat; he suspected that he had oversimplified. The Iszic were also involved. They also believed that he had a female house. Since they had attempted to follow him, they were ignorant of where he would deliver this hypothetical house.

Penche naturally would not want them to know. If the Iszic learned of Penche's involvement, breaking his franchise was the least they would do. They might well kill him.

K. Penche was playing for high stakes. On the one hand he could grow his own houses. They would cost him twenty or thirty munits apiece. He could sell as many as he liked at five thousand. He would become the richest man in the universe, the richest man in the history of Earth. The lords of ancient India, the American tycoons, the Pan-Eurasian syndics: they would dwindle to paupers in comparison.

That was on the one hand. On the other—Penche at the very least would lose his monopoly. Recalling Penche's face, the cartilaginous bar of his mouth, the prow of his nose, the eyes like smoked glass in front of a furnace—Farr instinctively knew Penche's position.

It would be an interesting struggle. Penche probably discounted the subtle Iszic brain, the fanatic zeal with which they defended their property. The Iszic possibly underestimated Penche's massive wealth and Earth technical genius. It was the situation of the ancient paradox: the irresistible force and the immovable object. And I, thought Farr, am in the middle. Unless I extricate myself, I will very likely be crushed. . . He took a thoughtful pull at his beer. If I knew more accurately what was happening, how I happened to become involved, why they picked on me, I'd know which way to jump.

FARR ordered another beer. On sudden thought he looked up sharply, glanced around the bar. No one appeared to be watching him. Farr took the container, went to a table in a dark corner.

The affair—at least his personal participation in it—had stemmed from the Thord raid on Tjiere. Farr had aroused Iszic suspicion; they had imprisoned him. He had been alone with a surviving Thord. The Iszic had released hypnotic gas through a root tubule. The Thord had killed himself; Farr had been stupefied.

The Iszic had certainly searched him, unit by unit, inside and out, mind and body. If he were guilty of complicity, they would know it. If he had seed or seedling on his person, they would know it.

What had they actually done?

They had released him; they had facilitated his return to Earth. He was a decoy, a bait.

Aboard the *Queen of Denmark*—what of all that? Suppose the Anderviews were Penche's agents. Suppose they had apprehended the danger that Farr represented and sought to kill him? What about Brunn and Gonsalve? Their function might have been to spy on the first two. They had killed the Anderviews either to protect Penche's interests, or cut themselves a larger slice of the profits. They had failed. They were now in custody of the Special Squad.

The whole thing added up to a tentative, speculative, but apparently logical conclusion: K. Penche had organized the raid on Tjiere. It was Penche's metal mole that the wasp-ship had destroyed eleven hundred feet under-

ground. The raid had nearly been successful. The Iszic must have writhed in terror. They would trace the source, the organization of the raid, without qualm or restraint. A few deaths meant nothing. Money meant nothing. Aile Farr meant nothing.

And small cold chills played up Farr's back.

A pretty blonde girl in gray sheenskin paused beside his table. "Hi, Cholly." She tossed her hair roguishly over her shoulder. "You look lonesome." And she dropped into a seat beside him.

FARR'S thoughts had taken him into nervous territory; the girl startled him. He stared at her without moving a muscle, five seconds—ten seconds.

She forced an uneasy laugh, moved in her chair. "You look like you got the cares of the world on your head."

Farr put his beer gently to the table. "I'm trying to pick a horse."

"Out of the air?" She pushed a cigarette in her mouth, archly pushed it toward him. "Give me a light."

Farr lit the cigarette, studying her from behind his eyelids, weighing her, probing for the false note, the non-typical reaction. He had not noticed her come in; he had seen her promoting drinks nowhere else around the bar.

"I could be talked into taking a drink," she said carelessly.

"After I buy you a drink—then what?"

She looked away, refusing to meet his eyes. "I guess—I guess that's up to you."

Farr asked her how much, in rather blunt terms. She blushed, still looking across the bar, suddenly flustered. "I guess you made a mistake. . . I guess I made a mistake. . . I thought you'd be good for a drink."

Farr asked in an easy voice. "You work for the bar, on commission?"

"Sure," she said, half-defiantly. "What about it? It's a nice way to pass the evening. Sometimes you meet a nice guy. Whatcha do to your head?" She leaned forward, looked. "Somebody hit you?"

"If I told you how I got that scab," said Farr, "you'd call me a liar."

"Go ahead, try me."

"Some people were mad at me. They took me to a tree, pushed me inside. I fell down into a root, two or three hundred feet. On the way down I hit my head."

The girl looked at him sidelong. Her mouth twisted into a wry grimace. "And at the bottom you saw little pink men carrying green lanterns. And a big white fluffy rabbit."

"I told you," said Farr.

She reached up toward his temple. "You've got a funny long gray hair."

Farr moved his head back. "I'm going to keep it."

"Suit yourself." She eyed him coldly. "Are you gonna spring, or do I gotta tell you the story of my life?"

"Just a minute," said Farr. He rose to his feet, crossed the room, to the bar. He motioned to the bartender. "That blonde at my table, see her?"

The bartender looked. "What about her?"

"She usually hang out here?"

"Never saw her before in my life."

"She doesn't work for you on commission?"

"Brother, I just told you. I never seen her before in my life."

"Thanks."

Farr returned to the table. The girl was sullenly rapping her fingers on the table. Farr looked at her a long moment.

"Well?" she growled.

"Who are you working for?"

"I told you."

"Who sent you in here after me?"

"Don't be silly." She started to rise. Farr caught her wrist.

"Let go! I'll yell."

"That's what I'm hoping," said Farr. "I'd like to see some police. Sit down—or I'll call 'em myself."

She sank slowly back into the chair, then turned, flung herself against him, put her face up, her arms around his neck. "I'm so lonesome. Really, I mean it. I got in from Seattle yesterday. I don't know a soul—now don't be so

hard to get along with. We can be nice to each other . . . can't we?"

Farr grinned. "First we talk, then we can be nice."

Something was hurting him, something at the back of his neck, where her hand touched. He blinked, grabbed her arm. She jumped up, tore herself loose, eyes shining with glee. "Now what, now what'll you do?"

Farr made a lurch for her; she danced back, face mischievous. Farr's eyes were watering, his joints felt weak. He tottered to his feet, the table fell over. The bartender roared, vaulted the bar. Farr took two staggering steps for the girl, who was composedly walking away. The bartender confronted her.

"Just a minute."

Farr's ears were roaring. He heard the girl say primly, "You get out of my way. He's a drunk. He insulted me—said all kinds of nasty things."

The bartender glared indecisively. "There's something fishy going on here."

"Well—don't mix me up in it."

Farr's knees unhinged; a dreadful lump came up his throat, into his mouth. He sank to the floor. He could sense motion, he felt rough hands, heard the bartender's voice very loud, "What's the trouble, Jack? Cantcha hold it?"

Farr's mind was off somewhere, tangled in a hedge of glass branches. A voice gurgled up his throat. "Call Penche. . . call K. Penche!"

"K. Penche," someone voiced softly. "The guy's nuts."

"K. Penche," Farr gurgled. "He'll pay you. . . Call him, tell him—Farr. . ."

XI

AILE FARR was dying. He was sinking into a red and yellow chaos of shapes that reeled and pounded. When the movement stilled, when the shapes straightened and drew back, when the scarlets and golds blurred, deepened to black—Aile Farr would be dead.

He saw death coming, drifting like twilight across the sundown of his dying . . . he felt a sudden sharpness, a discord. A bright green blot exploded across the sad reds and roses and golds. . .

Aile Farr was alive once more.

The doctor leaned back, put aside his hypodermic. "Pretty close shave," he told the patrolman.

Farr's convulsions quieted; mercifully he lost consciousness.

"Who is the guy?" asked the patrolman.

The bartender looked skeptically down at Farr. "He said to call Penche."

"Penche! K. Penche?"

"That's what he said."

"Well—call him. All he can do is swear at you."

The bartender went to the screen. The patrolman looked down at the doctor, still kneeling beside Farr.

"What went wrong with the guy?"

The doctor shrugged. "Hard to say. Some kind of female trouble. So many things you can slip into a man nowadays."

"That raw place on his head. . . "

The doctor glanced at Farr's scalp. "No. That's an old wound. He got it in the neck. This mark here."

"Looks like she hit him with a slapsack."

The bartender returned. "Penche says he's on his way out."

They all looked down at Farr with new respect.

Two orderlies in white sheen-skin came into the bar. The doctor rose to his feet. "Here's the ambulance."

The orderlies placed stretcher poles one on each side of Farr; metal ribbons thrust beneath him, clamping over the opposing pole. They lifted him, carried him across the floor. The bartender trotted alongside. "Where you guys taking him? I got to tell Penche something."

"He'll be at the Long Beach Emergency Hospital."

Penche arrived three minutes after the ambulance had gone. He strode in, looked right and left. "Where is he?"

"Are you Mr. Penche?" the bartender asked respectfully.

"Sure he's Penche," said the patrolman.

"Well, your friend was took to the Long Beach Emergency Hospital."

Penche turned to one of the men who had marched in behind him. "Find out what happened here," he said authoritatively and left the bar.

THE orderlies arranged Farr on a table, cut off his clothes. In puzzlement they examined the band of metal wrapped around his right shoulder.

"What's this thing?"

"Whatever it is—it's got to come off."

They unwound the woven metal, washed Farr with antiseptic gas, gave him several different injections, moved him into a quiet room.

Penche called the main office. "When can Mr. Farr be moved?"

"Just a minute, Mr. Penche."

Penche waited; the clerk made inquiries. "Well, he's out of danger now."

"Can he be moved?"

"He's still unconscious, but the doctor says he's okay."

"Have the ambulance bring him to my house, please."

"Very well, Mr. Penche. Er—are you assuming responsibility for Mr. Farr's care?"

"Yes," said Penche. "Bill me."

Penche's house on Signal Hill was a Class AA Type 4 luxury model, a dwelling equivalent to the average custom-built Earth house valued at 40,000 munits. Penche sold Class AA houses in four varieties for 10,000 munits—as many as he could obtain—as well as Class A, Class BB and Class B houses. The Iszic, of course, grew houses infinitely more elaborate for their own use—rich ancient growths with complex banks of interconnecting pods, walls shining with flourescent colors, tubules emitting nectar and oil and brine, atmospheres charged with oxygen and complex beneficiants, phototropic and photophobic pods, pods holding carefully filtered and circulated bathing pools, pods exuding nuts and sugar crystals and succulent wafers. The Iszic exported none of these, and none of the three- and four-pod laborer's houses. They required as much handling and shipping space, but brought only a small fraction of the return.

A billion Earthers still lived in substandard conditions. North Chinese still cut caves into the loess, Dravidians built mud huts. Americans and Europeans occupied decaying apartment-tenements. Penche thought the situation deplorable; a massive market lay untapped. Penche wanted to tap it.

A practical difficulty intervened. These people could pay no thousands of munits for Class AA, A, BB and B houses, even if Penche had them to sell. He needed three, four, and five-pod laborer's houses—which the Iszic refused to export.

The problem had a classical solution: a raid on Iszm for a female house. Properly fertilized, the female tree would yield a million seeds a year. About half these seeds would grow into female trees. In a few years Penche's income would expand from ten million a year to a hundred million, a thousand million, five thousand million.

To most people the difference between ten million a year and a thousand million seems inconsequential. Fortunes of such scope are calculated on an exponential scale.

Penche, however, thought in units of a million. Money represented not that which could be bought—but energy, dynamic thrust, the stuff of persuasion and efficacy. He spent little money on himself, his personal life was rather austere. He lived in his Class AA demonstrator on Signal Hill when he might have owned a sky-island, drifting in orbit around Earth. He might have loaded his table with rare meats and fowl, precious conserves, the valued wines, curious liquors and fruits from the outer worlds. He could have staffed a harem with the houris of a Sultan's dream. But Penche ate steak; he drank coffee and beer. He remained a bachelor, indulging himself socially only when the press of business allowed. Like certain gifted men who

have no ear for music, Penche had no taste for the accoutrements of civilization.

He recognized his own lack, and sometimes he felt a fleeting melancholy, like the brush of a dark feather; sometimes he sat slumped, savage as a boar, the furnaces glaring behind the smoked glass of his eyes, but for the most part K. Penche was sour and sardonic. Other men could be softened, distracted, controlled by easy words, pretty things, pleasure; Penche used this knowledge as a carpenter uses a hammer, incurious about the intrinsic nature of the tool. Without illusion or prejudice he watched and acted; here perhaps was Penche's greatest strength, the inner brooding eye that gauged himself and the world in the same frame of callous objectivity.

He was waiting in his study when the ambulance sank to the lawn. He went out on the balcony, watched as the orderlies floated out the stretcher. He spoke in the heavy harsh voice that penetrated like another man's shout. "Is he conscious?"

"He's coming around, sir."

"Bring him up here."

XII

AILE FARR awoke in a pod with dust-yellow walls, a dark brown ceiling vaulted with slender ribs. He raised his head and blinked around the pod. He saw square dark heavy furniture: chairs, a settee, a table scattered with papers and a model house or two, an antique Spanish buffet.

A wispy man with a large head and earnest eyes bent over him. He wore white sheen-skin and a white cloth jacket; he smelled of antiseptic: a doctor.

Behind the doctor stood Penche. He was a large man but not as large as Farr had pictured him. He crossed the room slowly, looked down at Farr.

Something stirred in Farr's brain. Air rose in his throat, his vocal chords vibrated; his mouth, tongue, teeth, palate shaped words; Farr heard them in amazement.

"I have the tree."

Penche nodded. "Where?"

Farr looked at him stupidly.

Penche asked, "How did you get the tree off Iszm?"

"I don't know," said Farr. He rose up on his elbow, rubbed his chin, blinked. "I don't know what I'm saying. I don't have any tree."

Penche frowned. "Either you have it or you don't."

"I don't have any tree." Farr struggled to sit up. The doctor put an arm under his shoulders, helped him up. Farr felt very weak. "What am I doing here? Somebody poisoned me. A girl. A blonde girl in the tavern." He looked at Penche with growing anger. "She was working for you."

Penche nodded. "That's true."

Farr rubbed his face. "How did you find me?"

"You called the Imperador on the stereo. I had a man in the exchange waiting for the call."

"Well," said Farr wearily. "It's all a mistake. How or why or what—I don't know. Except that I'm taking a beating. And I don't like it."

Penche looked at the doctor. "How is he?"

"He's all right now. He'll get his strength back pretty soon."

"Good. You can go."

The doctor left the pod. Penche signalled a chair up behind him, sat down. "Anna worked too hard," said Penche. "She never should have used her sticker." He hitched his chair closer. "Tell me about yourself."

"First," said Farr, "where am I?"

"You're in my house. I've been looking for you."

"Why?"

Penche rocked his head back and forth, a sign of inward amusement. "You were asked to deliver a tree to me. Or a seed. Or a seedling. Whatever it is, I want it."

Farr spoke in a level voice. "I don't have it. I don't know anything about it. I was on Tjiere atoll during the raid—that's the closest I came to your tree."

Penche asked in a quiet voice that seemed to hold no suspicion, "You called me when you arrived in town. Why?"

Farr shook his head. "I don't know. It was something I had to do. I did it. I told you just now I had a tree. I don't know why. . . ."

Penche nodded. "I believe you, Farr. We've got to find out where this tree is. It may take a while, but—"

"I don't have your tree. I'm not interested." He rose to his feet. He looked around, started for the door. "Now—I'm going home."

Penche looked after him in quiet amusement. "The doors are cinched, Farr."

Farr paused, looking at the hard rosette of the door. Cinched—twisted shut. The relax-nerve would be somewhere in the wall. He pressed at the dusty yellow surface, almost like parchment.

"Not that way," said Penche. "Come back here, Farr. . . ."

THE door unfurled. Omon Bozhd stood in the gap, tall, broad-shouldered, long-legged. He wore a skin-tight garment striped blue and white, a white cloche flaring rakishly back on itself, up over his ears. His face was austere, placid, full of the strength that was human but not Earth-human.

He came into the room. Behind came two more Iszt, these in yellow and green stripes: Szecr. Farr backed away to let them enter.

"Hello," said Penche. "I thought I had the door cinched. You fellows probably know all the tricks."

Omon Bozhd nodded politely to Farr. "We lost you for a certain period today; I am glad to see you." He looked at Penche then back at Farr. "Your destination seems to have been K. Penche's house."

"That's the way it looks," said Farr.

Omon Bozhd explained politely. "When you were in the cell on Tjiere, we anesthetized you with a hypnotic gas. The Thord heard it. His race holds their breath for six minutes. When you became dazed he leapt on you, to effect a mind transfer and fixed his will on yours. A suggestion, a compulsion." He looked at Penche. "To his last moment he served his master well."

Penche said nothing; Omon Bozhd returned to Farr. "He buried the instructions deep in your brain; then he gave you the trees he had stolen. Six minutes had passed. He clamped his throat on his breath and at the eighth minute died. That way he escaped the Mad House."

Farr looked rather anxiously at Penche, who was leaning negligently against the table. There was tension here, like a trick jack-in-the-box ready to explode at the slightest shock.

Omon Bozhd dismissed Farr from his attention. Farr had served his purpose. "I came to Earth," he told Penche, "on two missions. I must inform you that your consignment of Class AA houses cannot be delivered, because of the raid on Tjiere atoll."

"Well, well," said Penche mildly. "Not so good."

"My second mission is to find the man Aile Farr brings his message to."

Penche spoke in an interested voice. "You probed Farr's mind? Why weren't you able to find out then?"

Iszic courtesy was automatic, a reflex. Omon Bozhd bowed his head. "The Thord ordered Farr to forget; to remember only when his foot touched the soil of Earth. He planted well. Farr Sainh has a brain of considerable tenacity. We could only follow him. His destination is here, the house of K. Penche. I kill two birds with one stone."

Penche said. "Well? Spit it out! Get it off your skinny white chest."

Omon Bozhd bowed. His own voice was calm and formal. "My original message to you is voided, Penche Sainh. You are receiving no more Class AA houses. You are receiving none at all. If ever you set foot on Iszm or in Iszic suzerainity, you will be punished for your crime against us."

Penche nodded his head, his sign of inner sardonic mirth. "You discharge me, then. I'm no longer your agent."

"Correct."

Penche turned to Farr, spoke in a startling sharp voice. "The trees—where are they?"

Involuntarily Farr put his hand to the sore spot on his scalp.

Penche said, "Come over here, Farr, sit down. Let me take a look."

Farr growled, "Keep away from me; I'm not cat's-paw for anybody."

Omon Bozhd said, "The Thord anchored six seeds under the skin of Farr Sainh's scalp. It was an ingenious hiding place. The seeds are small. We searched for thirty minutes before we found them."

Farr pressed his scalp with distaste.

Penche said in his hoarse harsh voice, "Sit down, Farr. Let's find out where we stand."

Farr backed against the wall. "I know where I stand. It's not with you."

Penche laughed. "You're not throwing in with the Iszic?"

"I'm throwing in with nobody. If I've got seeds in my head, it's nobody's business but my own!"

Penche took a step forward, his face a little ugly.

Omon Bozhd said, "The seeds were removed, Penche Sainh. The bumps which Farr Sainh perhaps can feel are pellets of tantalum."

FARR fingered his scalp. Indeed—there they were; hard lumps he had thought part of the scab. One, two, three, four, five, six . . . His hand wandered through his hair, stopped. Involuntarily he looked at Penche, at the Iszic. They did not seem to be watching him. He pressed the small object he found in his hair. It felt like a small bladder, a sac, the size of a grain of wheat; and it was connected to his scalp by a fiber. Anna, the blonde girl, had seen a long gray hair. . . .

Farr said in a shaky voice, "I've had enough of this . . . I'm going."

"No you're not," said Penche, without heat or passion. "You'll stay here."

Omon Bozhd said politely, "I believe that Earth law prohibits holding a man against his will. If we acquiesced, we become equally guilty. Is this not correct?"

Penche smiled. "In a certain restricted sense."

"To protect ourselves, we insist that you perform no illegalities."

Penche leaned forward truculently. "You've delivered your message. Now get the hell out!"

Farr pushed past Penche. Penche raised his arm, put his palm flat on Farr's chest. "You'd better stay, Farr. You're safer."

Farr stared deep into Penche's smouldering eyes. With so much anger and frustration and contempt to express, he found it hard to speak. "I'll go where I please," he said finally. "I'm sick of playing sucker."

"Better a live sucker than a dead chump."

Farr pushed aside Penche's arm. "I'll take my chances."

Omon Bozhd muttered to the two Iszic behind him. They separated, went to each side of the sphincter.

"You may leave," Omon Bozhd told Farr. "K. Penche cannot stop you."

Farr stopped short. "I'm not kicking in with you either." He looked around the pod, went to the stereo-screen.

Penche approved; he grinned at the Iszic.

Omon Bozhd said sharply, "Farr Sainh!"

"It's legal," Penche crowed. "Leave him alone."

Farr touched the buttons. The screen glowed, focussed into shape. "Get me Kirdy," said Farr.

Omon Bozhd made a small signal. The Iszic on the right sliced at the wall, cut the communication tubule; the screen went dead.

Penche's eyebrows rose. "Talk about crime," he roared. "You cut up my house!"

Omon Bozhd's lips drew back to show his pale gums, his teeth. "Before I am through—"

Penche raised his left hand; the forefinger spat a thread of orange fire.

Omon Bozhd reeled aside; the fire needle clipped his ear. The other two Iszic moved like moths; each jabbed the pod wall with meticulous speed and precision.

Penche pointed his finger once more. Farr blundered forward, seized Penche's shoulder, swung him around; Penche's mouth tightened. He brought up his right fist in a short uppercut; it caught Farr where ribs met belly; Farr missed with a roundhouse right, staggered back.

XIII

PENCHE wheeled to face the three Iszic. They were ducking behind the sphincter, which cinched in after them. Farr and Penche were alone in the pod. Farr came lurching out from the wall and Penche backed away.

"Save it, you fool," said Penche.

The pod quivered, jerked. Farr, half-crazy in the release of his pent rage, waded forward. The floor of the pod rippled; Farr fell to his knees.

Penche snapped, "Save it, I said! Who are you working for, Earth or Iszm?"

"You're not Earth," gasped Farr. "You're K. Penche! I'm fighting because I'm sick of being used." He struggled to gain his feet; weakness overcame him. He leaned back, breathless.

"Let's see that thing in your head," said Penche.

"Keep away from me. I'll break your face!"

The floor of the pod flipped like a trampoline. Farr and Penche were jolted, jarred. Penche looked worried.

"What are they doing?"

"They've done it," said Farr. "They're Iszic—these are Iszic houses! They play these things like violins."

The pod halted—rigid, trembling. "There," said Penche. "It's over . . . Now—that thing in your head."

"Keep away from me . . . whatever it is, it's mine!"

"It's mine," said Penche softly. "I paid to have it planted there."

"You don't even know what it is."

"Yes I do. I can see it. It's a sprout. The first pod just broke out."

"You're crazy. A seed wouldn't germinate in my head!"

The pod seemed to be stiffening, arching like a cat's back. The roof began to creak.

"We've got to get out of here," muttered Penche. The floor was groaning, trembling. Penche ran to the sphincter, touched the open-nerve.

The sphincter stayed shut.

"They've cut the nerve," said Farr.

The pod reared slowly up, like the bed of a dump-truck. The floor sloped. The vaulted roof creaked. *Twang!* A rib snapped, fragments sprang down. A sharp stick missed Farr by a foot.

Penche pointed his finger at the sphincter; the cartridge lanced fire into the sphincter iris. The iris retaliated with a cloud of vile steam.

Penche staggered back choking.

Two more roof ribs snapped.

"They'll kill if they hit," cried Penche, surveying the arched ceiling. "Get back, out of the way!"

"Aile Farr, the walking greenhouse . . . You'll rot before you harvest me, Penche . . ."

"Don't get hysterical," said Penche. "Come over here!"

The pod tilted, the furniture began sliding down into the mouth; Penche fended it away desperately. Farr slipped on the floor. The whole pod buckled. Fragments of ribs sprang, snapped, clattered. The furniture tumbled over and over, piled upon Farr and Penche, bruising, wrenching, scraping.

The pod began to shake, the tables, chairs began to rise, fall. Farr and Penche struggled to win free, before the heavy furniture broke their bones.

"They're working it from the outside," panted Farr. "Pulling on the nerves. . . ."

"If we could get out on the balcony—"

"We'd be thrown to the ground."

THE shaking grew stronger—a slow rise, a quick drop. The fragments of rib, the furniture began to rise, shake

and pound like peas in a box. Penche stood braced, his hands against the table, controlling the motion, holding it away from their two soft bodies. Farr grabbed a splinter, began stabbing the wall.

"What are you doing?"

"The Iszic stabbed in here—hit some nerves. I'm trying to hit some other ones."

"You'll probably kill us!" Penche looked at Farr's head. "Don't forget that plant—"

"You're more afraid for the plant than you are for yourself." Farr stabbed here, there, up and down.

He hit a nerve. The pod suddenly froze into a tense, rather horrible, rigidity. The wall began to secrete great drops of a sour ichor. The pod gave a violent shake, and the contents rattled.

"That's the wrong nerve!" yelled Penche. He picked up a splinter, began stabbing. A sound like a low moan vibrated through the pod. The floor humped up, writhed in vegetable agony; the ceiling began to collapse.

"We'll be crushed," said Penche huskily. Farr saw a shimmer of metal—the doctor's hypodermic. He picked it up, jabbed it into the chalky green bulge of a vein, pulled the trigger.

The pod quivered, shook, pulsed. The walls blistered, burst. Ichor welled out, trickled into the entrance channel. The pod convulsed, shivered, fell down limp.

The shattered fragments of ribs, the broken furniture, Farr and Penche tumbled the length of the pod, out upon the balcony, through the dark.

Farr grabbed on the tendrils of the balustrade, broke his fall. The tendril parted: Farr dropped. The lawn was only ten feet below. He crashed into the pile of debris. Below him was something rubbery. It seized his legs, pulled with great strength: Penche.

They rolled out on the lawn. Farr's strength was almost spent. Penche squeezed his ribs, reached up, grasped his throat. Farr saw the sardonic face only inches from his. He drew up his knees—hard. Penche winced, gasped, but held fast. Farr shoved his thumb up Penche's nose, twisted. Penche rolled his head back, his grip relaxed.

Farr croaked, "I'll tear that thing out—I'll crush it—"

"No!" gasped Penche. "No." He yelled, "Frope! Carlyle!"

Figures appeared. Penche rose to his feet. "There's three Iszic in the house. Don't let 'em out. Stand by the trunk—shoot to kill."

A cool voice said, "There won't be any shooting tonight."

Two beams of light converged on Penche. He stood quivering with anger. "Who are you?"

"Special Squad. I'm Detective Inspector Kirdy."

Penche exhaled his breath. "Get the Iszic. They're in my house—"

The Iszic came into the light.

Omon Bozhd said, "We are here to reclaim our property."

Kirdy inspected them without friendliness. "What property?"

"It is in Farr's head. A house-seedling."

"Is it Farr that you're accusing?"

"They'd better not," said Farr angrily. "They watched me every minute, they searched me, hypnotized me—"

"Penche is the guilty man," said Omon Bozhd bitterly. "Penche's agent deceived us. It is clear now. He put the six seeds where he knew we'd find them. He also had a root tendril; he anchored it in Farr's scalp, among the hairs. We never noticed it."

"Tough luck," said Penche.

Kirdy looked dubiously at Farr. "The thing actually stayed alive?"

FARR suppressed the urge to laugh. "Stayed alive? It sent out roots—it put out leaves, a pod. It's growing. I've got a house on my head!"

"It's Iszic property," declared Omon Bozhd sharply. "I demand its return."

"It's my property," said Penche. "I bought it—paid for it."

"It's my property," said Farr. "Who's head is it growing in?"

Kirdy shook his head. "You'd better all come with me."

"I'll go nowhere unless I'm under arrest," said Penche with great dignity. He pointed. "I told you—arrest the Iszic. They wrecked my house."

"Come along, all of you," said Kirdy. He turned. "Bring down the wagon."

Omon Bozhd made his decision. He stood straight and proud, the white bands glowing in the darkness. He looked at Farr, reached under his cloak, brought out a shatter-gun.

Farr ducked, fell flat.

The shatter-bolt sighed over his head. Blue fire came from Kirdy's gun. Omon Bozhd glowed in a blue aureole. He was dead, but he fired again and again. Farr rolled over the dark ground.

The other Iszic fired at him, ignoring the police guns. Three flaming blue figures, dead, acting under command-patterns that outlasted their lives. Bolts struck Farr's leg. He groaned, lay still.

The three Iszic collapsed.

"Now," said Penche, with satisfaction, "I will take care of Farr."

Farr said, "Keep away from me."

"Easy, Penche," said Kirdy.

Penche halted. "I'll give you a hundred million munits for what you've got growing in your hair."

"No," said Farr wildly. "I'll grow it myself. I'll give seeds away free. . . ."

"It's a gamble," said Penche. "If it's male, it's worth nothing."

"If it's female," said Farr, "it's worth —" he paused as a police doctor bent over his leg.

"—a great deal," said Penche dryly. "But you'll have opposition."

"From who?" gasped Farr.

Orderlies brought a stretcher.

"From the Iszic. I offer you a hundred million. I take the chance."

The fatigue, the pain, the mental exhaustion overcame Farr. "Okay . . . I'm sick of the whole mess."

"That constitutes a contract," cried Penche in triumph. "These officers are witnesses."

They lifted Farr onto the stretcher. The doctor looked down at him, noticed a sprig of vegetation in Farr's hair. He reached down, plucked it out.

"Ouch!" said Farr.

Penche cried out. "What did he do?"

Farr said weakly, "You'd better take care of your property, Penche."

"Where is it?" yelled Penche in anguish, collaring the doctor.

"What?" asked the doctor.

"Bring lights!" cried Penche.

Farr saw Penche and his men seeking among the debris for the pale shoot which had grown in his head, then he drifted off into unconsciousness.

PENCHE came to see Farr in the hospital. "Here," he said shortly. "Your money." He tossed a coupon to the table. Farr looked at it. A hundred million munits.

"That's a lot of money," said Farr.

"Yes," said Penche.

"You must have found the sprout."

Penche nodded. "It was still alive. It's growing now . . . It's male." He picked up the coupon, looked at it, put it back down. "A poor bet."

"You had good odds," Farr told him.

"I don't care for the money," said Penche. He looked off through the window, across Los Angeles, and Farr wondered what he was thinking.

"Easy come, easy go," said Penche. He half-turned, as if to leave.

"Now what?" asked Farr. "You don't have a female house; you don't deal in houses."

K. Penche said, "There's female houses on Iszm. Lots of them. I'm going after a few."

"Another raid?"

"Call it anything you like."

"What do you call it?"

"An expedition."

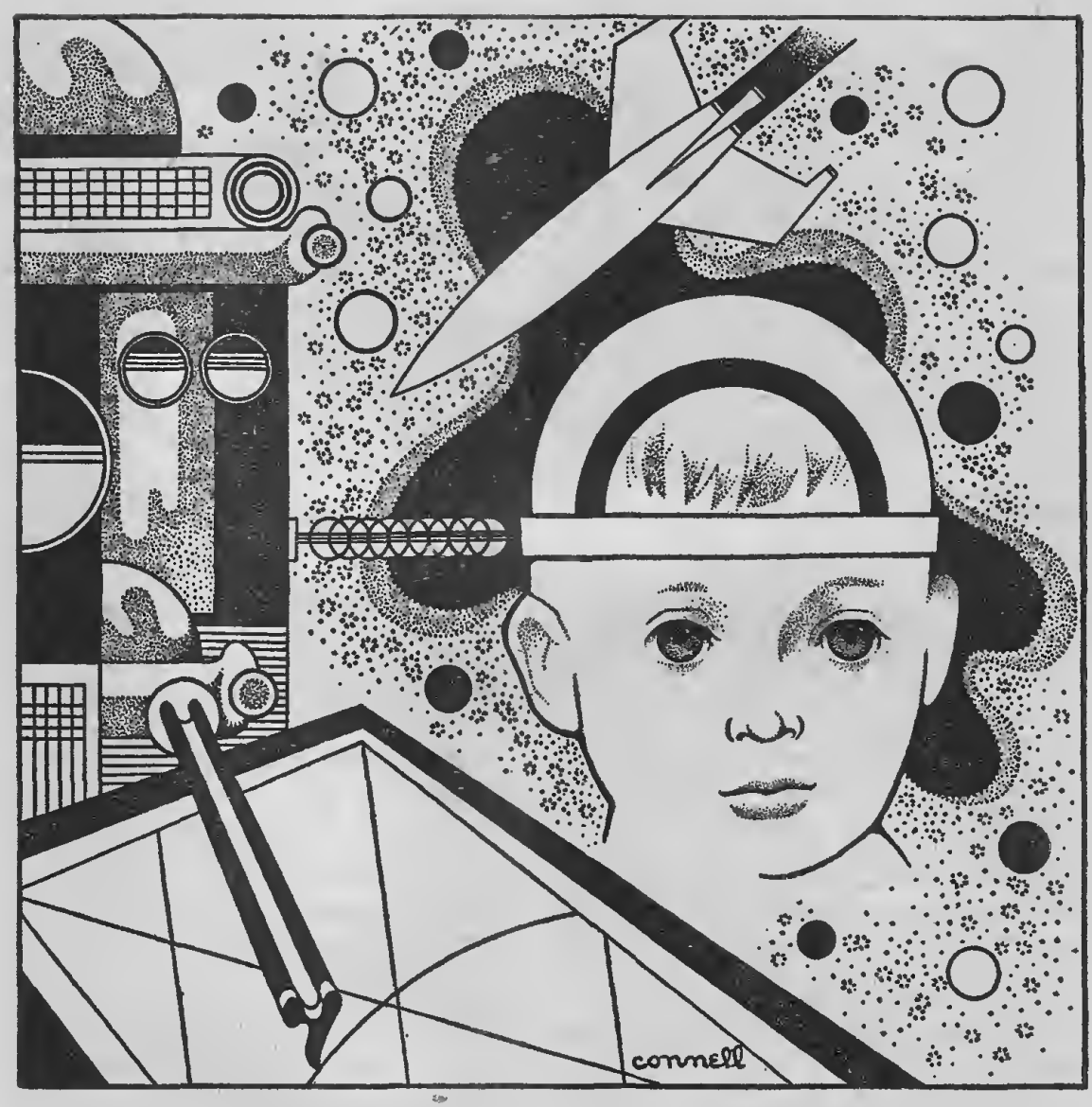
"I'm glad I won't be involved."

"A man never knows," Penche remarked. "You might change your mind."

"Don't count on it," said Farr.

K. Penche nodded his head in little short jerks, his mouth slightly pursed—sign of his inner amusement. He waved his hand. "So long."

"Good luck," said Farr to the broad back. "You'll need it."



LITTLE ENOS

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

He was no problem child. He just had a problem father. . . .

EMINENTLY fair, the Director said, recoiling in horror at Mr. Maxwell's words, "wholly democratic. I really am surprised at your attitude."

"Hoh!" said Mr. Maxwell, who did not believe in that archaic form of idealism known as democracy.

"It would be a different situation, of course, if you and your wife were members of the Society yourselves, but since you are commoners we had no other recourse than to give the applicant the tests. Then Genetics Board is very strict about these things, you know. Had he passed, the boy would then have become eligible for the Academy, and upon

graduation—for we fail no one here—he would have been awarded the Blue Seal of the Society, with all the privileges of the order. I am sorry to say that his quotient proved to be barely one-thirty, almost fifty points too low. That is the tragedy of non-selective breeding, I'm afraid."

"Bosh!" said Mr. Maxwell, a large man who, when he became indignant, was indignant all over. "Stuff and idiocy! Simply because your obsolete methods of testing fail to reveal the latent genius in my son, you see fit to discriminate against him. We will just see about this. I've got a few connections myself, you know. Come, son."

So saying, he seized Little Enos' hand in a firmer grip and marched down the long, marble hallway of that august institution, the Academy of Earth, with a hollow bitterness in his breast.

The finality of the interview was a dread incubus of failure that rode his shoulders, sagging them with its weight. Mr. Maxwell was a man to whom failure was as unbearable as it was rare. It hurt to have one's fondest dreams shattered. He had never been one of the elite himself, but he had always treasured the longing for his own children. To be a member of the Society was to be a deity among the aristocracy of Earth. To have the Seal was to have everything. Exceptional children among the commoners, and the offspring of holders of the Blue Seal were eligible for the Academy, the foremost school of the solar system, which turned out Earth's leaders; her scientists, teachers, statesmen, and starmen.

THE Genetics Board of Earth endeavored to maintain and upgrade the selectiveness of this group by intermarriage of its members. They did not always succeed, but they had their vengeance against renegades unto the seventh generation.

A member of the Society who married out of his class bequeathed none of his honors to his children, which was not quite as bad for the children as being born illegitimately, but not much better, either.

None of which was comprehensible to Mr. Maxwell, who was born of the class of poor commoners and had become, by exertion of mind and body, a rich commoner. Mr. Maxwell merely wanted the one thing for his son that he, himself, could never achieve; not because he particularly valued social prestige, but because the challenge was there, and challenges must be met.

Well, he had met this one head-on, and come away with a sore head. For the barest moment he felt a twinge of resentment toward—of all people—Sally. He put it away instantly with a surge of guilt.

Sally was blonde; Sally was beautiful. Sally could no more help being rattle-headed than he could help being in love with her. He was lucky to have a girl like Sally.

Nevertheless, the Director was right; one couldn't buck genetics. Poor Sally.

When the boy was born (one child, as limited to marriages outside the charmed circle of the Genetics Board's happy matchmakers,) he had been very hopeful. There never was so clever a child as Enos at the age of two. Sally had agreed that this was true.

Both of them had been ignorant of that chemistry within the body that metamorphoses the alert, normally clear thinking adult man or woman into the parent—a wholly different species.

"You oaf!" said Mr. Maxwell suddenly to the blue sky that had opened up to them at the exit. "You're lucky to have that girl."

Enos looked up at him. "What, Daddy?"

"Nothing, son."

"I didn't like that school anyway," Enos said. "The questions they ask are too hard."

"Of course," said Mr. Maxwell, and he swerved aside to avoid running into a brilliantly dressed being who seemed bent on colliding with him.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Maxwell. Enos stared at the colorful tunic:

"I beg *yours,*" the bright one said, "but aren't you the gentleman who came here this morning in the black limousine?"

"I am. But I can't see what possible concern that can be of yours."

"You were taking the child to the Academy. Results not good, eh?"

"I would rather not discuss it," Mr. Maxwell said. "Now if you will excuse us—" His limousine was waiting out on the flight platform with the chauffeur. Its big rotor was warming up for the take-off. He felt a distinct desire to be up and away from here.

The inquisitive man blocked his path still. "I can help you," he said.

SO THAT'S the whole story," Mr. Maxwell said to his wife. "Are you listening?"

Sally, bent over a doily that she was crocheting, nodded briefly.

"You must have heard of Dr. Yun Brool," said Mr. Maxwell.

"No."

"Well, this fellow was a Venusian, see; at least that's what he claimed, though I've heard they were kind of green. He was hardly the least bit green, if at all. Anyway, I've no reason to doubt it, because this Yun Brool has got a mental upgrading treatment that's so effective it raises a child's I. Q. as much as sixty percent, and it only takes a couple of weeks. The Venusian told me so."

Sally raised weary, incomprehensive eyes. "Where is he?" she said.

"Brool? On Venus; where do you think!"

"No, I mean the man who sold you this bill of goods."

Mr. Maxwell was instantly ruffled. "How would I know," he said. "He was just giving me a tip; that's all. Of course, if you *want* our son to grow up to be an ignoramous—"

"Don't say that!" Sally snapped, putting down her doily. Her eyes were blazing. "Don't ever say that again. He's sweet, and he's bright enough too. I don't see why you *will* change him."

"But listen, dear," said Mr. Maxwell, displaying his brown palms patiently, "Don't you see? I want to give the boy a chance. I want him to have the best of everything, and how can he have that if he can't get into the Society? If the treatment works his rating will be high enough to matriculate at the Academy. He'll be a Blue Seal, and I guess that's about the most we can get for him in life. Be reasonable!"

"So," said Sally, tossing her head, "commoners are no longer good enough for us. *I'm* not good enough for you."

"But Sally—"

"It's all so very silly. All this talk of points and special privileges for a crowd of long-nosed professors. Brains aren't everything. *We* were happy enough, at least until you got this idea in your head. If the Venusians are so smart, how come they aren't running the Federation instead of us? Besides, Venus is simply thousands and thousands of miles away, and—" Sally's blue eyes were puddling.

Mr. Maxwell put his arm around her.

"If you take Enos away up there," Sally said. "I'm going along."

That was when Mr. Maxwell demonstrated, with firm, quick decisiveness, the stern mettle that had put him where he was today. "That is simply out of the question," he said. . . .

A few days later the three of them disembarked at Venusport under pearl-gray skies that dulled the vivid green of that steamy world. There was no one to meet them.

"We are to go to Obion, on the edge of the Central Swamp," said Mr. Maxwell, "and contact our man there. The Federated Police mustn't know about this, you understand. The place is quite illegal."

"Why?" asked Sally.

"Why illegal? I don't know. I suppose it would just spoil everything for the Society and the Academy if everybody knew about this. Just think! They'd be flooded with applicants."

"It frightens me," Sally said.

"Why, that's nonsense," said Mr.

Maxwell. "What's there about it to frighten you?"

"I don't know," said Sally. She took a tight grip on her son's hand as she gazed around at the new, damp, grey-green world before them, at the alien spires of the city to the north of the spaceport where they stood. She shivered. Enos looked mildly interested.

They found the ancient city of Obion very disappointing. It was not extensive; its rough masonry was drab and lifeless, untinted by the brilliant colors of such modern metropolises as Venusport. It was a lingering reminder of the world of the old Venusians—the ones who had lived and built and died before the ships of Earth established communications between the planets. A dank, shadowy city; a silent city.

The Terran pilot of the coptercab that took them out there looked askance at them when they gave the address. But he said nothing.

Silent the place might be, but it was far from deserted as it had appeared from the air.

Within its sunless, narrow streets furtive beings from half a dozen worlds padded on mysterious errands. Here were the black market money changers, the lotteries, the rendezvous places for smugglers, and other nefarious businesses which defied description.

All this Mr. Maxwell knew, from the informative travel folders they had picked up en route. But he knew also that he could not back out now without a considerable loss of prestige in his family. He was genuinely glad to see the contact man when he appeared, a Venusian. The man came out of a doorway, suddenly, as they were milling uncertainly, wondering where to go next.

"Daddy," Enos said, "there's the man we met at the Academy."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Maxwell, "all Venusians look alike." But he was not so certain.

He thought it best to present himself boldly, and he did so. The Venusian indicated that they should follow him at once.

Mr. Maxwell felt some trepidation at this point. He glanced around the street. Were there no policemen here? He had heard that the outports were wild, unpatrolled. The starkness of their situation was just now making its impression upon him. Abysmally stupid of him to bring his family here. Still, he must show no fear.

"Come," he said, "we must not keep Dr. Yun Brool waiting."

THE Venusian led along numerous dark alleyways that were so narrow they might have reached out and touched the walls on either side. Mr. Maxwell, presently, found himself chilled, though the day was quite warm.

When they reached the dark portal at last, he had gotten to the point where he was silently imploring fate to save his family from his own folly, promising to humble himself ever after. Mr. Maxwell in this state of mind was incredibly out of character. In his lifetime of plodding self-righteousness, he could not recall that he had ever felt like this. What he felt was fear, but of course he did not know its name.

A moment later he was chiding himself thoroughly. They were suddenly face to face with Yun Brool himself, and there was nothing even remotely disturbing or fearful about Dr. Yun Brool.

He was a slight, kindly appearing man, with benign wrinkles about his eyes, and the most precious (as Sally observed in a whisper) silver hair.

"But surely," said Mr. Maxwell, stammering in his flood of relief, "Yun Brool is a strange name for an Earthman."

Dr. Yun Brool, who had been seated behind an extensive, but business-like plastic and chrome desk, got gravely to his feet. "My native name," he said. "I was born here. Won't you please be seated."

They complied.

"There are a few questions I must ask," said Dr. Brool. "You comprehend?"

"Of course," said Mr. Maxwell, but

he was thinking, *Oh, God, suppose we don't qualify after all!*

"First, have you any connection with the government?"

"None," said Mr. Maxwell with bitterness. "None whatever."

"You understand that we are forced to operate here without the sanction of the Federation. That is why we have been forced to locate in this unsavory Venusian border town." He wrinkled his patrician nose in distaste.

"That's what I don't understand," said Sally.

"But my dear lady. Don't you see? This kind of mental upgrading places the advantages of the Society within reach of anyone who can afford it." Dr. Yun Brool chuckled. "It's quite expensive—I hope you were forewarned—and therefore quite undemocratic."

"I like that," said Mr. Maxwell, giving his wife a penetrating look. "Undemocratic. I don't mind your saying it."

"Good. What is your occupation?"

"Hydroponics engineer," said Mr. Maxwell. "I own the Atlas Ponics Company."

"Your income?"

"Really," said Sally, "is that necessary?"

"Hush, dear." Mr. Maxwell named a figure with justifiable pride.

"I see. No—er—insanity or mental afflictions in your family?"

"None."

"Excellent. The treatment requires two weeks. It is a secret process of autosuggestive clearance of the brain. The average mind, you know—even the child's mind, is quite a cluttered thing Here we merely strive for a reorientation, and we nearly always succeed. The results are astounding. The treatment is harmless, and it carries a guarantee. You are to place the boy in my hands for fourteen days. At the end of that time I shall release him in your care. You may apply for examinations by the Interplanetary Board of Intelligence Rating. If the results are not satisfactory, you need not pay the remainder of the fee."

"The—remainder?" said Mr. Maxwell.

"Ten thousand now," said Dr. Yun Brool firmly. "Fifteen thousand upon the satisfactory completion of the treatment."

"That's a lot of money," said Sally quietly.

"The returns are substantial," said Dr. Yun Brool, meeting her gaze boldly. "I have never quite understood the hierarchy of the Society myself; I am foreign born, and therefore ineligible. But Earth, and the Federation sets great store by it. Most of my clients here are willing to pay much more than I have asked you for the privilege of becoming eligible."

"I wouldn't exactly call it a hierarchy," said Mr. Maxwell. "It's merely a concerted effort to improve the race by selective breeding. Surely you understand the desirability of that." He felt a trifle outraged at Yun Brool's callousness.

"I suppose so," said Dr. Yun Brool indifferently. Then, sensing that he struck a sensitive point with Mr. Maxwell, he abruptly changed the subject. He turned to Enos, who was sitting indifferently in his over-large chair with spidery legs folded under him.

HE SMILED in an affable, man-to-man manner.

"Would you like to stay here a while, my boy?"

"No," said Enos.

"You want to learn something, don't you?" Mr. Maxwell said belligerently. "You want to be a Blue Seal. A great scientist or statesman, or—"

"Could I be a spaceman?"

"Perhaps."

"Then I might stay," Enos said.

"Good for you," Dr. Brool said heartily. "Now if both of you will sign this paper—"

"I don't know." Mr. Maxwell shuttled a quick glance at his wife.

Dr. Yun Brool was silent for a moment. He was obviously trying to control some emotion deep within him.

"You—don't know?"

"We'd like to meet some of the others. The patients, I mean." The idea had come to Mr. Maxwell out of the blue. He was stalling, though he hadn't the slightest idea why he was stalling. But now that he thought about it, the idea seemed very sound. Even shrewd. He thrust his chin out aggressively, meeting Yun Brool's own glare.

Dr. Yun Brool sighed. "Very well," he said. He pressed a button on his desk.

Presently a slight, pale youth edged into the office. He was fourteen perhaps, Mr. Maxwell guessed, but sallow, as if from overwork and not enough exercise.

"Hello," Sally said. "What's your name?"

"Arnold."

"That's a nice name. Do you like it here?"

"Please, Sally," Mr. Maxwell said irritably, "let me do the questioning." He concentrated on the boy. Thin face. A kind of savage hunger in it; perhaps the insatiable hunger for knowledge instilled there by Brool. Well, that wasn't bad, was it?

"Supposing I test you?" he said.

"All right."

"Mathematics. Do you like mathematics?"

"I don't mind."

"You've studied vectors? Good. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to explain the line integral of a vector function to me."

"You let the radius be a vector function of the position vector. Then you integrate the vector function of that radius times the cosine of the angle of the vector along the path of the curve."

"Indeed," said Mr. Maxwell. He hardly remembered, himself. Dr. Yun Brool, he observed, was beaming with pride.

"Arnold," he said, "is one of my permanent students."

"What else has he studied?"

"Tell them, Arnold."

"Physics," Arnold said. "The calculin, including variations and finite differences. Space mechanics. Quadidimensional geometry. Advanced chemistry and stellar navigation."

Mr. Maxwell turned to his wife, essaying a smile of triumph. "Satisfied?" he said.

"Not quite. There are other important things, such as the appreciation for morality and beauty. I want to know what this is going to do to my child."

"Morality," said Arnold, with a fierce conviction, "is nothing more than the outgrowth of ancient inhibitions, functional insufficiencies left over from the childhood of our race. Beauty is a primitive sensitiveness to orderly patterns within the universe. Once you understand the basic idea, you don't have to appreciate it any longer."

"Oh dear," Sally said. Dr. Yun Brool was frowning slightly at Arnold. He shook his head slowly.

Sally was blanched but determined. She went over and took the boy's thin shoulders in her hands. "Are you happy?" she asked.

Arnold's face had become a curious mask. The word slipped out unbidden and soundless; just the barest motion of his lips to give him away.

"No." He twisted out of her grasp and fled out the door.

It seemed to Mr. Maxwell that his wife cried a great deal, of late. She was crying now.

Dr. Yun Brool said hastily, "The boy is overwrought; he's been working a bit too hard, I'm afraid. You won't misunderstand, I hope. I've cautioned him about it, but—"

"We are not leaving Enos with you," said Sally.

MR. MAXWELL suddenly observed that the inner radiance which benevolently lighted Dr. Yun Brool's seamed face had passed away. Even the sheen of his hair seemed dulled, and his eyes darker. He was old now, very old—and slightly sinister.

"I am truly sorry," he said, "but it is a little late to back out of it now."

"What do you mean by that?" Mr. Maxwell felt a tenseness, a gnawing sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"I dislike to resort to the crudities of kidnapping," said Dr. Yun Brool, his eyes snapping. "I dislike even to think about it. But you leave me no choice but to detain all of you here. I need money. You have much more than you will ever use, Mr. Maxwell." And then, seeing his prisoners' darting glances, "Do not try to run. There are Venusian guards outside my door."

He laughed amusedly at what Mr. Maxwell presumed must be the incredulous despair on his own face. Despair he felt, and a smouldering rage that threatened momentarily to burst into flame. The thing was so outrageously clear to him now, his own culpability, his own colossal ignorance.

In a calmer frame of mind he would never have done the rash thing which he did now, but the redness that was flowing down over his brain blotted out all rational thought.

IT WAS a purely animal growl that emerged from between his bared teeth as he sprang.

Dr. Yun Brool was unprepared. In any case it would have done him no good. He went down hard and flat, and the air went out of him.

The blows were unnecessary, in so far as Yun Brool was concerned. Mr. Maxwell supplied them because there was blind pleasure in the feel of his fists against the flesh.

There were hands upon his shoulders now, of course; voices shouting at him; rough arms trying to pull him away from Brool. He swiveled around, swinging his arms in a flailing endeavor to fight them

"Okay, show me this flower that tried to pick you!"

off. He tried to get to his feet, but they were pressing him down firmly, trying to stay the fury of his arms.

"Please, Mr. Maxwell," one of them said.

Mr. Maxwell became quiet. He stared at them. "You're not his men," he said wonderingly.

"Of course not. We are the police."

THE crimson-tunicked lieutenant, Mr. Maxwell thought, was especially civil. Charitable was the word. Mr. Maxwell was still in the throes of his original bewilderment, and trying not to show it.

"Then the whole thing," he said, "was a hoax. And I'm a fool for falling into it."

He felt that he could not look Sally in the face, but kept his eyes on his feet as he spoke.

"Not a hoax," said the lieutenant, with a sad smile. "Worse than that. Yun Brool works with certain forbidden drugs that really do what he says—step up alertness of the mind to an unbelievable rate while the user is under the influence. The only drawback is that the later effects of the addiction are rather horrible."

Sally shuddered.

Mr. Maxwell put his arm around her. "Can you ever forgive me?" he asked humbly. "If it hadn't been for my crazy notions about the importance of this damn thing I never would have—" His voice broke and refused to go on.

"Never mind," Sally said, and kissed him. She let him detach himself from her and watched fondly while he took Enos by the hand and led him out to where the patrol copters waited.

"Thank you, officer," she said.

The lieutenant was young, and very confused. "You are quite welcome," he said. "Though I must confess, I am somewhat at a loss. Your husband informed us by messenger in Venusport, that we might be needed here, and instructed us upon how to close in; yet he seemed surprised to see us. We came at once, of course, when we saw the seal of the Society. We are instructed to obey their requests, however strange they may seem, at all times. And yet—" He shook his head.

"My husband did not send any message," said Sally.

"He didn't? But the seal?"

Sally fumbled for a moment in her purse. In a black cover she found the emblem. She showed it to him.

The officer was agog. "I'm sorry—that is, I'm overwhelmed. You see, I never met a member of the Society before. Had I known that you were a Blue Seal, Madam—"

She smiled at him. "You've been very nice," she said. "But you must say nothing more of this. You see, my husband—Mr. Maxwell—doesn't know. We are very happy this way. A great many members of the Society, I am told, conceal their membership for just such reasons. Do you understand, Lieutenant?"

"But why?"

She sighed. "My husband is an individualist, Lieutenant. I should not want to lose him. Please say nothing."

The young officer stared for a moment, contemplatively. "I think I get it," he said.

He hurried and caught up with Mr. Maxwell, who was helping Enos into the copter.

"That's a fine, bright-looking boy you have there, sir," he said cheerfully.

Mr. Maxwell tried to keep the pride out of his voice. "Bright?" he said. "The boy is ignorant as a hog."

Featured in the Next Issue

THE SPIRAL OF THE AGES

A New Novel by

FLETCHER PRATT

STOP-OVER

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

They were a long way from civilization, but there was something of home here for her . . .

IT WAS the kind of snow that falls all day and all night and all the next day. It had been falling now since morning, steadily falling, softly falling, piling ever higher around the little station, sifting

soundlessly down through the branches of the surrounding trees, filling the the aisles and the meandering paths between the trees. Down the hill the raw wet wound which the departing ship had left on the snow-covered tarmac had long since healed, and the spaceport was once more an immaculate white clearing in a continental forest on a man-forsaken primitive planet.

"For heaven's sake, Deborah, haven't you ever seen it snow before?"

She turned from the wide window. Ralph was pacing the room again, the trade journal he had been trying to read lying in a disheveled heap on the table. "Not since I was a little girl," she said.

"Well, you've certainly made up for it today. You haven't budged from that window since we got here."

"I used to live on a primitive planet, remember? And sometimes it would snow like this and we'd be cooped up in the house for days, and there wouldn't be anything to do but sit by the window and watch the snow drift down—"

"And read old romantic novels and anemic pre-expansion poetry. You've told me all that before."

"You were in one of the novels," she said.

He stopped pacing and stood before her. "I'm behaving like an irritable old man," he said suddenly. "Forgive me, Debs. It's this damned delay. It's so upsetting, so humiliating."

"I know it is, darling."

"Imagine landing us here so they could go chasing half-way across the galaxy to pick up some barbaric tycoon! I may not be the most important citizen in the Empire, but I deserve some consideration."

"Why don't you mix yourself a drink and try to relax. I'm sure the second section will be along soon."

"You know how I feel about drinking."

"Of course I do; but there isn't the remotest possibility of your having to negotiate any business deals on this planet, so what difference can it make if your mind does become less acute?"

He shook his head. "It's a matter of principle. You know that, Debs."

SHE looked down at her hands. They were long slender hands and she held them interlaced on her lap. "You didn't drink in the novel either," she said. "I thought it was so noble of you."

"That sounds like sarcasm."

"I didn't mean it that way . . . do you remember the first time you saw me? I was sitting on top of the wagonload of hay my father had brought into the community silo. It was a summer morning, and you were standing in front of the big red office talking with the Grange Leader, and suddenly you glanced up and the sunlight struck your face in just the right way, and—"

"What's come over you, Deborah? You've never talked this way before."

"It's the occasion, I guess. The snow, the forest, this quiet little room. But you do remember, don't you?"

"Sure I remember. It wasn't *that* long ago."

"I had been reading an old novel. An ever so old novel. And I had a picture of the hero in my mind. It was such a resplendent beautiful picture that I knew he could not possibly be real, and yet there he was, standing not fifty feet away, as real as I was, as real as the morning was, as real as reality can ever be. . . ."

"So that's why you nearly fell off the wagon." Ralph laughed. "I've always wondered what there was about me that you found so irresistible. Now I know." For a moment he looked very young, almost boyish. Then, swiftly, his habitual facial pattern returned: the relentless lines flowed back and set—the hard mouth lines, the deep forehead lines, the faint radial lines at the eye corners.

He looked at his watch. "It should be here by now," he said. "The captain said eight hours."

"Eight or ten hours," Deborah said in a lifeless voice.

"I think I'll call the tower."

"You just called half an hour ago."

"I know, but something may have

come in." He went over to the communicator.

The operator's youthful face wriggled into focus on the screen. "Anything on the second section yet?" Ralph asked.

"Not yet, sir. It'll be here soon, though."

"I should think so! It's late now."

"Not technically, sir. It still has nearly two hours grace-time."

"It'll probably use up every minute of them, too! They know they've got two passengers to pick up, I hope."

"The first section notified them. There's nothing to worry about, sir."

"What's the name of this atrocious planet, anyway?"

"Walden, sir."

"Walden! I suppose that was the name of the character who discovered it!"

"I don't think so, sir. It's one of those diehard words that have lost their meaning. It probably dates all the way back to the Early Expansion Era when the planet was inhabited. Before the Hub Migration."

"It's not important anyway," Ralph said. "Well, make sure you notify us the minute that section comes in."

"I will, sir."

The face faded and the screen reassumed its gray pallor. Ralph walked over to the table, picked up the trade journal, and riffled through it. After a moment he threw it down on the table again. He lit a cigarette with jerky fingers. "We could have been home by now," he said.

WHEN he received no reply he looked around. Deborah was curled up in her chair, her face close to the window, her breath making little vapor smudges on the glass. Outside the snow fell steadily, and beyond the diaphanous changeable curtain of the falling snow the dark blue mass of the forest showed.

"Damn it, Deborah, you act as if you don't care whether the ship comes or not!"

She turned from the window, slowly. There was an expression on her face he had never seen before. "Suppose it doesn't come, Ralph."

"It has to come!"

"But suppose it doesn't. Suppose we have to stay here for a few days, maybe even a week. All alone in this little station, with nothing to do but eat and sleep and talk; with nothing to worry us, with no one to bother us. Just the two of us, here, alone, way out in the middle of nowhere."

"You're being absurd, Deborah. You know perfectly well that I'm scheduled to appear before the Board tomorrow night. I have a report to make, or did you forget that this was an important business trip?"

"But just suppose you *can't* be there. No one could ever have a better excuse. The other directors would never hold it against you."

"I'm afraid you don't understand. I *have* to be there!"

"But—"

"And the ship *has* to come. It *has* to!"

"Well don't worry, darling," she said. "If it has to, I'm sure it will."

"I'm not worried!"

"Of course you're not. It's a sacrilege to worry about the vicissitudes of space travel. It implies a doubt of the galactic scheme of things."

"Now you're being cynical."

"Maybe I am. Maybe we've been here too long already—let's go out and watch for the ship."

"In the *snow?*"

"Why of course. The snow won't hurt us. That way we'll be sure not to miss it."

He looked at his watch. "It's overdue now," he said. "All right. We'll go out and watch it come in."

They donned their white snowsuits and pulled up the fleece-lined hoods. Ralph picked up their portmanteau. "Couldn't we come back for it?" Deborah asked.

"When that ship comes down I'm not coming back here for anything."

THEY had to squint their eyes against the snow. It stung their faces. It

melted on their cheeks and ran coldly down to their lips. They turned their backs to the wind and ran to the lee of the station. The woods were at their elbow and the hill dropped away below them, down to the unsullied circle of the port. The tower was barely discernible in the bluish dusk. It was an ungainly mechanical tree standing on the circumference of the circle, distinguishable from the real trees by the warm yellow light that glowed in the window of its metallic tree house.

Deborah took a deep breath. "How beautiful!" she said.

Ralph was shivering. "We should have stayed inside. We'll freeze out here."

"No we won't. How could anybody freeze on a world as lovely as this!"

Their breaths made little pale clouds in the air.

"Wouldn't it be nice if we could go outside our own apartment and find a world like this," Deborah said, "instead of corridors and arcades and make-believe parks and other apartments? It would be nice, even, if they'd put something on the tele-windows besides summer days and summer sunshine."

"I thought you liked to see the sun every day. Everybody else does."

"Not *every* day. Besides, it's hard to forget sometimes that's an alien sun, lightyears away, shining on a weather-conditioned primitive planet, and that the only thing outside my window, really, is an ugly little box filled with silver tubes and copper wires."

"But what more practical arrangement could you have for a shielded city? You wouldn't want to be subjected to the combined radiations of the Hub suns, would you?"

"The least they could do is condition three more primitive planets; one for autumn, one for winter, and one for spring. Then we could have four tele-window programs, instead of one eternal, glaring summer program. . . ."

"You're being unfair, Deborah. You know perfectly well that summer weather is an integral part of the environmental psychology of our civilization. It has a definite euphoric effect upon the individual; it imbues him with zeal for his work; it brightens his existence."

"In my father's house there were real windows," Deborah said. "When it rained you could hear the raindrops spattering against the panes and if you wanted to you could step outside the door and feel the rain against your face, soft and cool and clean. But when it snowed it was best of all because then you could look out and see the ordinary world you knew slowly change into a resplendent white kingdom. You could see the trees, like these trees, and see the little snow ridges building up along their branches, and you could see the snow piling deeper and deeper around the trunks, and if you knew a certain tree real well, and you could remember the details of its trunk, the knotholes, the bark patterns, the scars, you could always tell just how deep the snow was. . . ."

Ralph was staring at her. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes had microcosmic stars in them. He had seen those eyes only once before in his life, he remembered in sudden astonishment. They were the eyes he had gazed into, too many years ago, when he had looked up and seen the lovely little peasant girl sitting on top of the wagonload of hay.

"Darling, there's an old poem my father taught me," Deborah said. "An ever so old poem. Would you mind if I said it now? Maybe there'll never be another moment quite like this one."

"All right, Debs."

"It's a beautiful poem. Listen:

Whose woods these are I think I know,
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

* * *

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
*And miles to go before I sleep."**

**From "Complete Poems of Robert Frost" by permission of Henry Holt & Co., Inc.*

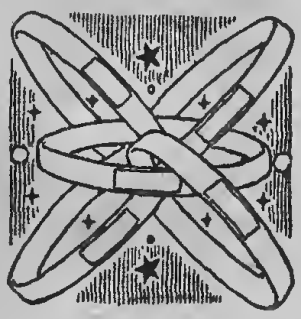
"The ship! There's the ship!" Ralph shouted. He started running down the hill, half dragging the heavy port-manteau. The snow fell thickly all around him.

The ship was a gray ghost. It settled down from the murky sky on incandescent bursts of fire. Steam rose up from outraged snow; the old wound reopened and the raw blackness of the tarmac showed in a ragged circle. The ship came down in the middle of the circle and squatted on metallic spider legs.

"Hurry up!" Ralph shouted from halfway down the hill. "You don't want to be *stranded* here, do you?"

She hurried after him, stumbling on numb legs, the salt taste of her tears intermingling with the clean sweet taste of the snow. . . .

Submicroscopic Galaxy

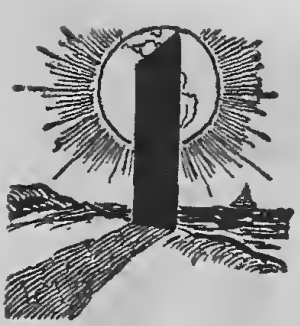


A thousand suns were blazing in
A weirdly whitened sky,
Where molecules were pregnant with
The fact that they must die.

A universe was ending there
In all its timeless glory,
And all its peopled planets knew
The terrifying story.

Each sun was growing dimmer from
A lack of energy—
And none could check the fading nor
Evolve a remedy!

And high above this universe,
I played the part of God;
I turned their puny worlds to dust—
It wasn't very hard.



I did it with a simple switch,
Connected to a wire,
That carried current to a bulb
Once lit with suns on fire.

by A. KULIK

It took a trip to Ganymede to

prove to Reid that the one thing

he couldn't escape was himself . . .

RUNAWAY

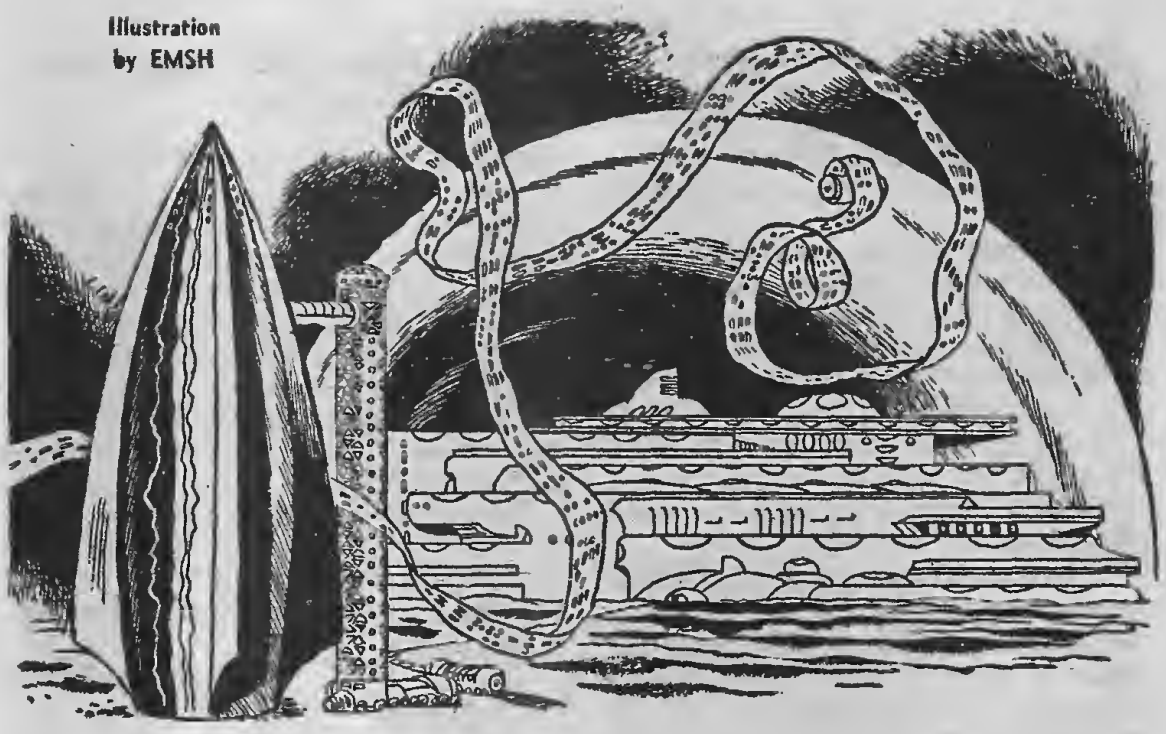


Illustration by EMSH

I

ANTHONY REID sat on his sun-deck and stared at the city. He had a splendid view of it, for the housing unit in which he lived—a charming structure of white plastibrik with solaray glass throughout and the latest in reactor heating—was built on a ledge of the low hills above Sunset Boulevard. There were others, above and below and beside it on both sides as far as he could see, so that the hills had taken on the appearance of stiffly serrated cliffs.

And to the east and west and south and north was the city, pink and white and yellow, pale blue and green and gray, squares and cubes and pylons, flowing into every crevice of the hills, inundating the crests, pouring back into the valleys and filling their flat immensity and going on, until it was stopped by two barriers it could not overleap, the desert on one side and the Pacific on the other.

It was still a horizontal city, with few skyscrapers. Old Earthquake, as rough and primitive as ever, still lived beneath it, and the underlying shale and sandstone were no firmer than they had ever been for the bracing of deep foundations. But it was big. It used the Pacific Ocean for a reservoir, and the hydroponic tank farms that grew its food had a total area of three hundred square miles. Its name was still Los Angeles.

a novelet by LEIGH BRACKETT

"It's incredible," said Anthony.

His wife glanced at him from the chaise where she was lying. "What is?"

"To think that once this was all open country. Just cattle range, from the desert to the sea."

Fern Reid finished her cocktail—a mildly stimulating synthetic with none of the deteriorating effects of the old-fashioned alcohol—and rose, stretching her soft pale arms. "It seems like an awful waste of good land," she said, yawning. "There's a program on. Will you get it while I fix the supper?"

Anthony seemed not to have heard her. He was still looking at the city.

"There used to be droughts," he said. "Years with no rain—they depended on rain, then—and all the grasses and things dried up. They had to drive whole herds of animals over the cliffs, so that the rest could have enough to eat. That must have been very hard on the ranchers to do."

"Well, fortunately, nobody has worries like that any more. For heaven's sake, Anthony, will you stop mooning and get that program? The children have to see it for their homework, and I can't do everything around here."

He got up and followed his wife into the living area. The floor was resilient under his feet, warm in winter, cool in summer. The walls were done in soft pastels. He crossed to the one that was opposite both the living and the dining areas and pushed a button. A panel slid back, revealing the large screen. He pushed two more buttons, and full automatic tuning brought the picture in clear and steady, in three dimensions and true color. Inevitably, it was the middle of a commercial.

"—ignore the warning signs of emotional disturbance," the earnest announcer was saying. "At the first symptoms of nervousness, moroseness, or any abnormal reaction, take Passif for that mild, non-habit-forming sedation prescribed by the medical profession—and see your psychiatrist *at once*. Remember, Passif is not a cure. But for the relief of—"

Anthony started, and listened with a curiously furtive interest.

PHYLLIS, aged nine, was setting the table. From behind the plasti-glass screen that closed off the kitchen area came the clicking of control buttons and the low hum of the electronic rapid-heat units. In a corner of the room, at a low, broad shelf littered with games and toys, young Tony was building a complicated structure of plastic blocks. He was rising twelve. "Your program's coming on," said Anthony.

"Homework," said young Tony sourly. "I don't see why they have to load us down after school, too." He pushed the blocks petulantly aside and went over to the table.

"By the way," said Anthony, "I've been meaning to ask you. Have you learned to read yet?"

"Now stop devilling the boy!" said Fern, coming in with a tray of bright containers. "You know perfectly well what it does to a child's emotions to be forced. He just isn't adjusted to reading yet."

"Besides," said young Tony, "who reads any more?"

"I can," said Phyllis. "And spell my name, too."

"Huh," said Tony. "That doesn't prove you're so smart."

"Supper's all ready," said Fern, in her most musical voice, looking daggers at Anthony. "There, the program is on. Let's all watch it as we eat, and then we can discuss it later."

Automatically, Anthony opened his individual sterile containers and pecked at what was in them, a high-protein jelly and various processed vegetables, topped off with a synthesized sweet. Between bites he watched the program. It was in the "Earth's Proud Heritage" series, and it told the story of SC-3, the little ship that was afraid to go into space. SC-3 ran away from its launching rack and took shelter in a museum hangar, where Lieutenant Wajert's great *Luna VI* related to it in vivid flashbacks the mighty story of man's first successful flight to

the Moon. Backgrounds and model work were superb, and it was intercut with some of the actual films taken by Wajert. SC-3's final release from fear and its joyous flight along the space-trail blazed by *Luna VI* was movingly done. But Anthony glowered at the screen, unsatisfied.

"They might," he said, "have mentioned the five other rockets that crashed with everyone aboard before Wajert finally made it. And I remember reading that two of Wajert's crew died on the Moon."

"Why should they mention it?" said Fern. "It's unpleasant, and it had nothing to do with the story, anyway."

Flight to Reality

IF SCIENCE fiction be the ultimate in escape literature, in RUNAWAY it comes full circle. For the protagonist in this story finds he cannot escape himself even by running faster and farther than man had run before. Science or no science, man carries his universe with him. This is a bit of a departure for Leigh Brackett, though it still embodies the wonderful color and imagery which is the hallmark of her talent.

—The Editor

"Because it isn't honest, that's why. If they're going to tell a thing, they ought to tell it."

"Oh, you're always finding fault," said Phyllis. "I thought it was lovely."

"Who cares, anyway?" said young Tony. "History. Phooey." He rose and went dourly back to his blocks.

"Honestly, Anthony, I don't know what's got into you," Fern said. "Nothing seems to suit you any more. And look there, you've hardly touched your dinner again."

"I'm just not hungry," he said, and added hastily, "Nothing about the food, it was fine." He grabbed a book and went out on the sun-deck, hearing Fern muttering behind him something about as hard as she worked to get the meals the least people could do was eat them, and Phyllis asked with shrill and ghoulish interest, "What's the matter with Daddy, is he starting to have a breakdown?"

Again Anthony started, this time quite violently. "No!" he thought. "No, of course I'm not."

He sat down and resolutely opened the book. It was a best-seller and one he had wanted to read for some time, but he could not keep his attention on the story in spite of the top-notch art-work. Captions and dialogue blurred before his eyes. His mind swirled, not producing anything in particular but a vague sense of unease and frustration. *At the first symptoms of abnormal reaction, take Passif. . . .*

Suddenly, he was afraid.

FERN finished her task of pitching the used containers down the disposal chute and came to join him. "Your hands are shaking," she said. "Yes they are, look there! You're not eating, and you've done nothing but toss and turn all night for a week. Now, we might as well have it out, Anthony, you know as well as I do that evasions are unhealthy. What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing," said Anthony, choking down an alarming impulse to yell at her.

"Now, dear. A week, perhaps a day or two more. Yes, I remember it was Tuesday, because you quarrelled with the children over what their history teacher said about dirt-farming, and you told them their great-great-grandfather was a dirt-farmer, and Phyllis cried. Now, what happened last Tuesday? I'm trying to think—wasn't that the day Mr. Jennings was taken ill?"

"Perhaps it was. What difference does it make?" Anthony flung down the book. "There's nothing the matter with me except you won't leave me alone!"

"There!" said Fern triumphantly.

"That got a reaction. It *is* Mr. Jennings!"

"Mr. Jennings, Mr. Jennings!" Anthony sprang up, and there was no possible doubt now about his nervous quivering. "What's he got to do with anything? I've worked for him for fifteen years, but I never saw him and he never saw me. I'm still working for him, and if he spent the next century in the Recreation San it wouldn't change anything for me or any of the two-thousand-and nine other employees of the Jennings Accounting Service. No matter who lives or dies these days, it's all the same."

Fern nodded. "Exactly. That's why I can't understand why you're so upset about it."

"Oh, Lord," said Anthony. "I'm going down to the com-room and play a game of ball with George."

"All right," said Fern stiffly to his retreating back. "But if you don't straighten out pretty soon I'm going to call Dr. Eckworth."

The automatic lift took him down to the basement area where the community room was, and as usual in the evenings George Grosset was there, drinking a Peppy and waiting for someone to play with him. They solemnly tossed for ends, and then sat down at the glassed-in case. "I get first play," said George, and punched a row of buttons. The light metal ball began to dance as the magnetic impulses caught at it.

Anthony pushed his own buttons, but it was no use. George shook his head. "Off our game tonight," he said. "Really off. Try another?"

"Sure," said Anthony savagely, and scowled at the ball.

"Better relax a little first," said George. "You're all tensed up. Here, have a Sootho."

Anthony accepted the cigarette. He glanced furtively at George, seized with a desire to talk. George smiled at him. "Go ahead," he said. "I've been waiting for it all week."

"You've noticed, too?"

"No timing, no co-ordination. I could tell by your game."

Anthony leaned forward. "I did tell you about Mr. Jennings."

"Your boss? Sure. Had a breakdown —personal fulfilment trauma."

"Yes. But *why*, George? He has pots of money, a flourishing business, a nice wife and kids, and no worries. Why should a successful man like him get a fulfillment trauma?"

"The stresses and strains of modern living," said George heavily. "Fortunately, it's not too serious. He'll be right as rain in a year or two. And as for you, Tony, take my advice, as a friend. Go and get yourself pysched. It's better to nip these things in the bud." He patted his ample middle and grinned. "I've had the widgets too, Tony boy, I know all about it. But I just toddle myself right off to the doctor, and look at me. Contented as a baby."

"That's it, though," said Anthony, suddenly crystallizing the vague thought that had been tormenting him. "That's the thing. Listen, George. You and I— we both have good jobs, good pay, regular promotions, all that. We live well. We're comfortable. We don't have to worry about the future. Now why, *why*, George, you tell me, should you and I have any reason to be psyched? What are the causes?"

"The stresses," said George firmly, "and the strains of modern living. It's just a part of it, that's all. No use fighting it, boy. Just roll with the punch, and you'll get along."

He smiled, nodded wisely, and went to the dispenser for another bottle of Peppy.

That night, determined to sleep, Anthony took double his usual dose of slumber pills. It didn't do any good. For a long time he lay awake in the quiet dark, thinking of Mr. Jennings in his palatial office bursting suddenly into tears and wailing like a lost child, "Who am I? Tell me who I am and what I'm doing here!"

"If," thought Anthony into the unresponsive night, "that can happen to a man like Jennings—what hope is there for me?"

II

OVER breakfast, a hollow-eyed and irritable Fern said grimly, "I'm going to make an appointment for you today. Now there's no argument about it, Anthony, I simply refuse to put in any more nights like the last one, with you groaning and yelling and thrashing about. You're making a nervous wreck out of *me.*"

Anthony nodded. "I suppose you're right. Make it for next Thursday, if you can. That's my full day off."

He went down and got into his car, feeling tired and submissive. After all, getting psyched was no more awful than taking a purgative. He supposed it rather alarmed him simply because he'd always been well adjusted and had never felt the need of it before.

"I guess George was right," he thought. "Stress and strain. Oh, well. I'll get some of that Passif stuff on my lunch period."

He pushed the Engaged button on the dash, and the automatic buried-cable system picked him up and fitted him smoothly into the stream of traffic. It was a blazing hot morning, but he never noticed it. The car, like the apartment and the office building to which he was going, was perfectly air-conditioned.

Usually he watched the car video during the drive downtown, but this morning, for some reason, the songs and gay chatter of the personable young lady who starred in the "Commuter's Hour" left him sulkily unresponsive. He looked out the window instead, smoking a Sootho and trying not to fidget.

He stared at the bright storefronts and the advertising displays until he tired of them, and then gradually his attention was drawn to the cars that flowed in massed lines on either side of him. The relay systems, operating from the buried cables to control centers in the cars, kept the vehicles exactly spaced apart, moving the traffic smoothly, slowing it individually or in the mass as needed and speeding it up again, all so gently that not a shock or a jar disturbed the passengers. Most of the people in the cars were watching the "Commuter's Hour." A few were reading. A few more were talking together, and here and there one was just sitting, not doing anything. Anthony looked at them, idly at first and then with a growing fascination, and a notion began to circle around his brain that frightened him into a conviction that he did indeed need a psychiatrist, and as soon as possible.

"They're all like one person," said the notion. "They look the same—not superficially, but really. Do I—"

Unable to resist the impulse, he peered at himself in the dashboard mirror. He looked for a long, long time in a kind of quivering horror, only rousing himself at the last minute to press the Right Turn button that took him off the freeway and into the parking area of the Jennings Accounting Service, Certified Accountants to the Solar System.

Like a man in a dream, and not a very pleasant one, Anthony left his car for the automatic parking system to take care of, and entered the building.

It was a very large building. The halls were very long, cool, polished, and softly lighted, so that the lines of people moving through them seemed almost to swim in a liquescent gloom, trailing their shadows beside them. Anthony knew only a few of them even by sight. Suddenly he was no longer sure of those. He took the escalator up to the third floor, darted around a corner, and achieved the solitude of his own calculator room. He was breathing hard. Sweat prickled on his skin, and his heart was pounding. Abnormal reactions. George was right. . . .

Work. That was the best thing. Get to work and forget about it. He took off his jacket. Automatic relays had already activated the calculator, and the morning's work was piled under the delivery tube. He prepared to get busy.

Anglo-Martian Enterprises, semi-annual account, a vast thick spool. How many Anglo-Martians did this make for him? He counted on his fingers. Twenty-nine. Or was it thirty? Too many, any-

way. He pushed a button on the calculator, and then pressed the *on* switch on the electro-scanner and started the tape feeding in. The calculator began to hum.

ANTHONY sat down and watched the metal ribbon glide slowly in. Code dots and holes. Holes and code dots. He got up and went back to the stack again. He looked at other spools. Finally he picked one up and went out of his room and down the hall to the next door. He rapped and opened it.

Bill Stocker laid down the picture magazine he was looking at and said, "Come on in."

Anthony went in. Stocker had been here, in this same room, four years longer than Anthony. It was his boast—untrue—that he had worn out six calculators. The one beside him now was quietly devouring the data passed to it by its scanner, cerebrating with a scarcely audible hum. Stocker looked at Anthony and frowned.

"You look ragged this morning. What's on your mind?"

"This," said Anthony, pointing to the account in his hand.

"Is it wrong some way?"

"I don't know. How, when you come right down to it, would anybody know?"

"Then what—?"

"All these code dots, Bill. These long columns of little holes, with the squiggles in front of them. I've been running them into the scanner for fifteen years, and it never occurred to me to wonder before. What are they? What do they stand for, monsters? Women's underwear? Martian rubies, fire opals from Venus, six thousand vitamin-enriched candy-bars? *What?*"

"For the love," said Bill Stocker, "of the eternal Mike." And he stared.

"But don't you know? Didn't you ever wonder?"

"Look," said Stocker. "Are you crazy or something? Who knows, who cares? It comes out right on the total, and that's all that matters."

"Yes," said Anthony. "I suppose it is."

He went back to his own room and shut the door. He sat and watched the calculator. When it had eaten up all of Anglo-Martian he pushed the OFF switch on the scanner and then punched a couple more buttons. The original spool was returned to him, together with a second containing complete calculations of Anglo-Martian's debits, credits, interest, investments, and et cetera, more dots and holes that only another machine could read. He placed both spools in the OUT tube, picked up the next account, and returned to the scanner. He reached out to push the switch again, and then it happened. Something snapped.

"That," he said, staring at his extended forefinger, "is the only part of me that's really necessary. It pushes buttons. The rest is just waste material."

The account he was holding fell with a reproachful thump on the floor. "Just a great big bunch of trash," Anthony muttered, and began to shake. There was a roaring in his ears, and a suffocating tightness in his chest. The calculator leered at him, with its banks of little glowing eyes. It laughed, quite audibly, in a soft humming undertone. Its rows of buttons mocked him. They extruded themselves, became enormous, and danced horribly before his face. The wisdom of the calculator was greater than his, and it knew it. It understood the secrets of the metal tapes, and it could pass them on to others of its kind, and he was shut out. Anthony's lips pulled back, baring his teeth.

He struck at the buttons. He struck them again and again, but the circuit-breakers that guarded against the small human-fallibility quotient left in the world immediately disengaged those relays activated out of sequence. The calculator continued to laugh. He kicked it, and its shielded front repelled his foot. A small feral whine came out of Anthony's mouth. He grabbed up the account he had dropped and threw it at the thick protective glass that covered the maze of circuits. Panting, he went to the pile and gathered it all up and hurled the spools one by one after the first. He

cursed them.

"Fine things for a man to spend his life at. Dots. Holes. Abstractions. Nothing. Columns of nothing, totals of nothing, and nobody even cares if there is a reality behind them, and I have trouble adding two and two myself, in my own head, because why learn, the machines can do it faster and never make a—"

THE phone rang. He turned on it and cursed it, too, but it kept on ringing and the insistence of long habit and the necessity of answering it made him calm down, at least enough to force a semblance of normality. His face ached. He rubbed it a few times with his hands, and then cast a look of guilty horror at the mess he had made. When he answered the phone he stood close to the screen so that his body would block any view of the room.

It was Fern. "I called Dr. Eckworth," she said. "You're to go at two o'clock this afternoon."

"But I told you Thursday!"

"Now don't take that tone with me, Anthony Reid. Dr. Eckworth is a very busy man, but simply because he's a personal friend he managed to work you in on a cancellation. He says it's imperative to get started on these neuroses—"

"Fern!"

"Don't interrupt me, Anthony, this is important. He—"

"Fern, how many times have you been to Dr. Eckworth?"

"You know perfectly well I go twice a year for a regular check-up. And well it would have been for you, too, but you never would listen."

"Stated in plain English," said Anthony curiously, "what reason have you got to run twice a year to a psychiatrist?"

Her voice took on that hard whining edge he knew so well. "I suppose you think that taking care of a home and two children—"

"You know something?" said Anthony, interrupting her for the fourth and last time. "That is all one big lot of bull." He was quite calm now, and his mind, or at least a part of it, was in a state of icy clarity. "You and I, and George, and the rest of us—we're not even people any more, we're just a gang of mass-produced zombies living in a dream world, and not doing one damn thing to justify our existence. And we know it. You ask Dr. Eckworth about *that,* and if he tells you different, he's a liar." Just before he cut her off he added thoughtfully, "I think young Tony is smarter than I realized. Tell him to stick to his blocks. At least they're tangible."

The screen went blank. Immediately the bell began to ring again, but he let it, standing where he was with a look of profound wonderment.

"I don't even like her. All these years, and two kids, and I don't even like her."

He turned and picked up his jacket. The calculator still watched him, unscathed and derisively humming. Anthony walked over to the steel-and-plastic chair in which he had been wont to sit out his working day. His frenzy had left him. This was something quiet, and pleasurable. He lifted the chair over his head and let it fall crashing through the glass dust shied. Then he went out, closing the door carefully behind him.

The long cool corridors were empty now. He was conscious of the hundreds of people behind those hundreds of doors, pushing their hundreds of buttons. He began to run, not making any noise on the cushioned floor. Fern would call Macklin, his supervisor, to check on him. The building was a trap. He must get out of it.

HE WAS winded and lathered when he reached his car, but even after he was on the highway again he breathed no easier. He realized now that the whole city was a trap, a vast faceless formless entity that held him and all its other millions, in a sly and subtle bondage, like a mother who lavishes every care and luxury upon her children and asks nothing in return but their individ-

uality. No wonder that so many, even as Mr. Jennings had, sank into it without a trace. He was sinking himself. He had to escape.

"Escape," said the top one-quarter of his brain, functioning tightly over chaos. "But there are only other cities. Between them are the hydroponic and synthetics and processing plants that feed them, and the reservoirs a county broad that water them, and the atomic plants that power them, and the breeder-reactor plants that feed *them*. The cities have swallowed up the land."

"There are the deserts."

"Nothing lives there. Cattle used to live on some of them, until the water was used up and the land blew away in dust. Now there is nothing."

"All right. Then I'll go out. Listen, I want to go on being Anthony Reid and it's hard because there isn't much to be, only a name and a set of memories as flat as your hand. The only real thing I ever did was just now, and you know what that means if I stay. Dr. Eckworth, and a Recreation San, and after that—like George, contented as a baby. Only a baby grows up, but you never do. You just lie there, rolling between contentment and the Dr. Eckworths. I'm getting out."

"Money," said that top, tight bit of sanity. And Anthony stopped at the bank.

While he was there he sent a 'gram to Fern, telling her not to worry. *Take care of the kids till I get back—I'm all right, I just have to do this.* Then, with half his savings in his pocket, he headed eastward to Mojave and the spaceport.

III

THERE were always sightseers at the port. There was a feeling of expectancy and change, a quiver of thunder in the air, a vicarious thrill in the far-off flashing of a silver flank and the bursting roar of a launching. It was especially fine at night, with the rocket flames arcing against the desert stars, and Anthony had brought the family out to dine in the Pylon Room and watch. The kids had been bored with it after the second look and Fern had complained about the noise. He had not come back.

Not until now.

The interval of the drive had not been good. Things had had time to force their way up out of that submerged three-quarters of chaos into the light of his conscious mind. Doubt. Fear. Panic. Strange emotions, strange and new.

He had broken the pattern. For thirty-six years he had lived inside it, enlarging it slightly to include Fern and then the children, but never deviating from its main outlines. The city. The apartment. The schools, the amusements, the job, the amusements, life. Now he had smashed it, literally, and it dawned on him that he did not exist outside of it.

Paradox. Who are you, why are you? Break free, stand alone, find out. But when you do, where are you? You have disappeared.

He crept furtively among the sightseers, feeling ashamed and helpless. There were things he had not thought of in his first fine flush of inspiration. Passports. He didn't have one, and all the money in the world wouldn't buy you a ticket to anywhere without it. So how was he going? And what was he going to do when he got there—things like eating and sleeping went on and had to be paid for. In the glare of the desert sun, among the chattering spectators, he felt cold and very naked.

He wanted to go back. He wanted to run to Fern and the apartment, to the warm and familiar and comfortable. He wanted the pattern around him, a shelter and a guide. Maybe they were right. A good psyching, and he'd be right as rain again, contented as a baby—

No.

There we are again. Mother-image, back-to-the-womb. No. Thirty-six going on thirty-seven is too old for that, if you're not a man now you never will be. Besides—

Think of Fern. Clackety-clack, poke and pry and watch. It could never be the same again. She wouldn't leave you

alone a minute, peering into your face, sniffing like a hound after symptoms, drawing the swaddling bands tighter and tighter, until—

People did have breakdowns that were permanent.

And yet—

Anthony teetered on the sharp knife edge and wished that the police would come and find him so that the decision would not be his. But they didn't, and the time was growing short, and that top one-quarter of his mind that had steered him this far jeered and said, *Making decisions is maturity. You made this one. You were passionate about it. If you can't abide by it you'd better quit.* And it added, *Coward.*

How, asked Anthony reasonably of himself, would I know whether I'm a coward or not? I've never had any occasion to find out.

Here's your chance, and you'll never do it younger. But run back if you want to. Fern will love it.

Anthony stiffened his back and began to walk. The balance swung sharply over. Now instead of wishing for capture he was frantic lest it should happen.

But what could he do—stow away? Steal a passport? Sign on as a crew member? Impossible, all of them. Anthony thought bitterly that once civilization had laid hold of you it was mighty hard to get loose from it.

He had reached the stage of desperation where he would have tried anything when his eye fell upon a sign over a doorway. EMIGRATION. He went in.

SOME ninety or a hundred people, counting children, were inside in a big bare room, grouped around their separate islands of luggage, waiting. They glanced at him, or the nearest ones did, incuriously, and then forgot him again, sunk in their own thoughts. Anthony looked at them. Family groups, couples, a few unattached men standing sour and solitary by a single bag. Bankrupts, failures, people who could not cope even with the mild complexities of push-buttons.

The Government paid their passage to the colonies, and gave them some kind of a start after they got there. Anthony didn't know much about it, but he did know you had to prove necessity before you could get emigration papers. So that way too was closed to him.

Unless—

Anthony's heart began to pound again. His nervous system was getting a workout today such as it had never had before, and at any other time he would have worried about the harmful effects of all the various secretions his glands kept pumping into him. Just now he was too excited to care. He examined the single men, discarding one by one the impossibly large or small or dark or fair. Anthony himself was on the medium side all round. He settled at last on a sulky-looking chap who fitted the same description well enough, and went up to him.

"You don't look," he said, "as though you really wanted to go out."

The sulky man glared at him. "What the hell is it to you?"

Anthony thought, "He's a bum. The video-houses, the pleasure-pools, the amusement parks—that's where he's done all his living. He doesn't want to work." His hopes began to rise. He said aloud, "I want to buy your papers."

The man stared at him for a long moment, quivering. Then he said, "Come over here, over by the window. All right, what's your proposition?" He glanced nervously at the huge clock face over the far door. "Make it fast. We're almost due to go aboard."

Anthony made it fast. But before he had finished the warning bell rang and the groups of people began to be agitated, attacking their heaps of luggage like so many ants. A babble of voices rose and filled the room. That was good. It was perfectly timed. Nobody noticed that it was Anthony who joined the stream of people moving out onto the field, carrying the sulky man's bag in his hand, and his papers in the pocket where once the wad of bills had been.

There was a line of buses drawn up. They were funneled into them and driven out across the wide field in the glaring sun toward a ship that loomed more huge and frightening with every second. Again the pendulum of Anthony's mind swung back, and he thought, Oh God, I'm going, I'm really going, and I can't, I'm scared . . .

The movement of people caught him up again and took him toward a gangplank that went up and into a dark hole in the ship's side. A man in uniform, with another one beside him, stood at the foot of it and asked in a monotonous voice for papers. The dark hole fascinated Anthony with the horrid fascination he had read about snakes having for birds. He was fairly up against it now, and the inside of his head had become a blank emptiness. He fumbled automatically for the papers and never thought to worry whether or not he would be found out.

The uniformed man gave them a cursory glance and shoved them back into Anthony's hand, and the upward-moving stream carried him in through the hold. There was a corridor clangorous with the sound of boots on iron and crammed with the sound of voices. Then there was a large room odorous of disinfectants, with a table and benches bolted down in the middle and tiers of curtained bunks around the sides.

"Stow your luggage and strap in," bawled a metallic voice from a speaker overhead. "Stow your luggage and strap in. Take-off in twenty-nine minutes."

Anthony stumbled into a bunk, shoving his bag into a metal bin underneath that was labelled in red letters for the purpose. He found straps and fastened them with cold hands. After that he merely lay there and shook, very quietly.

The voice from the speaker overhead began to count. ". . . . three . . . . two . . . one . . . zero."

A wave of wild excitement rose in Anthony, amid the stupendous and horrifying blast of take-off. I've done it, he thought, I've really done it, and I'm free!

IV

SPACE might, or it might not be, all the things it was said to be on the TV programs, from Miss-Out-There-in-her-starry-dress to the veritable face of God. Anthony didn't know. He didn't see it. The emigrant hold was not provided with an expensive and fabric weakening viewport. And if it had been it would hardly have mattered. Like everybody else there, Anthony was spacesick, and most of the voyage passed him by in a haggard dream of misery.

The papers he had bought said that his name was Joseph Rucker, that he could operate a stamping press, and that he was bound for Venus. Anthony said that last bit over to himself quite often, but it seemed not to have any real meaning. Venus itself had never seemed very real to him, in the way that places like India and Timbuctu had not seemed very real to his middle-western ancestors. It was a long way off. He remembered a lot of talk about man's conquest of savage nature, and his engineering genius and his courage, and he knew that it was hot on Venus, and that the air was bad. He knew that Venus was important because it produced very large amounts of uranium, thorium, germanium, and a lot of other things that Earth was using up too fast. And that was all he knew, except that people had to live there under domes, and that it never rained.

"Whatever it's like," he thought, "things are moving there, growing. It's still the wilderness, the frontier, still untamed—at least a lot of it. There ought to be something there for a man to do, something real."

Among the papers was a long and detailed certificate affirming that Mr. Rucker had been examined, processed, and inoculated for and against a frightening number of things. Anthony worried about that because he wasn't, and then he passed on to worrying about being caught for his small but growing list of felonies. He knew he was going to have to go back sometime and face the music, but not until—

Well, not until.

Then the ship's thin pseudo-gravity got in its evil work again, and he ceased to worry about anything.

After the long blank interval of flight there was the roaring convulsion of a landing, and he tottered out with the others into a sealed tube that had been connected to the ship's lock, and along that into an airtight monstrosity that ran on huge grinding tracks. There were windows in it. Anthony got his first authentic look at the face of the Morning Star.

There was a reddish gloom, partly cloud and partly dust, so intermingled that it was hard to tell where one left off and the other began. It was in a state of constant turmoil, rolling and boiling in a wind that was blowing strong enough to rock the vehicle on its mighty tracks, and things moved in it, portentous shadowy shapes of carriers and mobile machinery peering their way with glaring headlights. Here and there, made strange and enormous by the mantling clouds, were the ships, the last link with Earth and home. One by one they vanished. Dust and cloud and wind took over, and the lines of dismal faces pressed to the windows turned gradually away. Some of the women were crying, and one little girl kept demanding with monotonous insistence, "Where's the *sun?*"

The vehicle ground and grunted over a drifted road for perhaps three miles, and then Anthony saw a cluster of squatty domes in the murk ahead, transparent except for the webbing of girders. Presently the vehicle trundled in through a lock door that closed behind it, and a little while after that Anthony found himself in a long and very hot shed with a lot of signs about immigrants and procedure. He took his turn obediently at a battered table with an old, hard, weary man behind it, a man who had seen too many immigrants come and go.

"Joseph Rucker," he said, making notes off the papers Anthony handed him. "Stamping press operator—"

Anthony coughed nervously. "I—uh—I'd like some other kind of work. Something manual."

The immigration man stared at him. Then he leaned back and stared some more. Finally he asked, "Are you crazy?"

"N-no. I just—"

"Listen, mac. The government is not interested in what you'd like to do, it's only interested in what you can do. Something manual, huh?" He looked at Anthony's hands and snorted. "You better stick to the cities, you'll find 'em tough enough here." And he wrote down, "Stamping press operator."

Anthony quivered like a trapped animal. "Look, I—well, I'm afraid I lied about that." Stamping presses ran by push-button, but they were different from calculator buttons and utterly beyond his ken.

"Oh lord," said the immigration man. He picked up a damp and dirty handkerchief and wiped off the sweat that was running down his jowls, and muttered something about his sins. Then he said to Anthony, "You could go to jail for that."

"I was tired of my job," said Anthony desperately. "I wanted a change, something different—"

"Something manual. Yeah. All right, let's stop wasting time. What *was* your job?"

ANTHONY twisted from left to right, searching for some escape, but there was none. He whispered, "I ran a calculator."

"A calculator," said the immigration man, and smiled. "Now we're getting at it. What *kind* of a calculator, Mr. Rucker? Technical, astronomical, financial—? Come on, Mr. Rucker, it's an honest occupation, you don't have to be ashamed of it."

Anthony gave up. "CPA."

"Calculator operator, CPA," said the immigration man, and wrote it down. "This is how I earn my living, but sometimes I don't think it's worth it." He turned to a card index. "Associated Mines needs a man in the accounting

department. Interview at ten A.M. tomorrow, and don't miss it. Here's your card, and here's your ticket to the hostel. You can stay there till you find quarters of your own, limit four weeks. If for any reason you're turned down on the job, report here to me *immediately*. We've got a check system to make sure you don't lounge on the taxpayers, so don't try it. And don't accept any kind of employment from unauthorized persons. Got it? Right through that door there for decontamination—*Next!*"

Anthony picked up his bag and crept away through the indicated door. Amid a pandemonium of shrieking children and protesting adults he allowed himself to be rayed, dusted and gassed, to kill what external bacteria he might be carrying. Then there was an ultimate door and he was through it, standing half dazed in a street so narrow and so full of people and trucks and heat under the low dome that the simple act of breathing became a conscious labor.

He stepped to one side, out of the way of the other immigrants coming through. The hostel, marked by a huge sign, was just across the street, but he made no move to go there. His face was red and his eyes were unnaturally bright. He looked at the card he still held in his hand. Calculator operator, CPA. Couldn't you get away from it, wouldn't they let go of you? Suddenly he tore the card in pieces and threw it away. Then he walked swiftly down the street.

In half a block he was drenched with sweat and ready to fall. Man's conquest of savage nature had not been as complete as he had been led to believe. The outside temperature stood around the boiling point of water, and the dome was refrigerated, all right—to a point where existence was possible, but not much more. The people on the streets wore so little clothing that Anthony felt conspicuous. The air was stale, like spaceship air, re-used and stagnant in spite of manufactured oxygen, in spite of blowers and conditioners, in spite of the masses of huge coarse broad-leaved plants that grew in every crevice, in islands in the streets, in holes and alleys. A use had at last been found for the terrestrial burdock.

It was a nightmarish kind of a city. The flimsy buildings huddled and crowded and overlapped one another, and the dome pressed down on top of them, a thin and claustrophobic barrier against death. The ocherous half-light was depressing and hard on the eyes. Most of the buildings were white or bright metal, but they only looked dull and dingy. Anthony walked slower and slower.

He came to a corner. Traffic, wild and jerky, filled the streets before him. He guessed at electric motors—exhaust fumes would be an impossibility here—and after he had stared for a minute or two he realized that the vehicles were manually operated. A lifetime of mental conditioning aroused in him a terror of these ill-controlled juggernauts that had slaughtered over two million people in the United States alone before they were finally tamed by the cable systems. He looked for a pedestrian underpass, but there didn't seem to be any. How did you get across?

Then a wave of furious shame at his own helplessness came over him. He gritted his teeth and stepped off the curb. In the next second a hand closed on his collar and wrenched him back, and a truck went by so close that he felt it brush him. Shaking, Anthony turned around. "Let go," he said, "I'm going to do it myself."

The man who had hold of him nodded. "Sure, sure. But you'll live longer if you watch the lights. See there? Primitive, but we can't afford a cable system here yet, or at least everybody says we can't. All right, it's green our way. Make sure everything's stopped, watch that slob sneaking around the corner—okay, now run like hell!"

They made it.

"Don't feel that way about it," said the man, grinning. "We're all like that when we first get here." He was short and barrel-shaped, dressed in rumpled shorts. His pale body gleamed with sweat, and there was more of it on his

cheeks and the bald top of his head. He had an affable face, with eyes in it like two little blue marbles.

"My name's Crider," he said. "Listen, I saw you tear up your card back there—"

Anthony began to walk again, fast. Crider's short thick legs carried him right alongside.

"Easy, boy. Easy does it, you don't run any foot-races in this climate. You want a job?"

Anthony slowed down.

"Right around the corner here," said Crider. "There's a place we can talk."

THERE was a narrow six-story shack squeezed in between a string of video-houses and a place that sold mining equipment. The ground floor was a bar, and the upper windows were painted with the signs of assay offices, mining company agents, and small outfitters.

"Everything's mining here," said Crider. "People only come out for two reasons, because they want to or because they have to, and money's at the back of both of 'em, and there's money in mining. This stinking planet's made of money. All you have to do is dig it out."

The bar was small and badly lighted. There were as many women in it as men, drinking the synthetic stimulants that gave them the illusion of liquor without the effects. Crider motioned Anthony into a private cubbyhole at the back.

"If," he said, "anybody could manage to make some honest old-fashioned whisky like I've read about, he'd have his fortune made without digging a spoonful of ore. Notice all the video houses and pleasure halls? More to the square foot here than any city on Earth. Know why?"

Anthony shook his head. He was looking hard at Crider, trying to figure him, trying to understand why he felt uneasy.

"Because," said Crider, "people need the relief, the relaxation. They go psycho here a lot." Drinks had appeared on the table, and he pushed one toward Anthony. "Really psycho, not just fancy neurotic. I'm a little that way. Got a fire phobia. I saw fire in a dome once, and now a lighter flame can send me screaming. Why'd you tear up your card?"

Anthony shook his head.

"Okay, so it's none of my business. But you do want a job?"

"Depends on what it is."

"Oh," said Crider. "Picky. Don't exactly trust me, do you?"

"It's not that," said Anthony, lying. "It's just—"

"I know. They warned you at Immigration not to accept employment from 'unauthorized persons.' " Crider swore. "Sure, they've got a tie-up with the big companies, and us little guys never get a chance. Listen, how do you suppose I happened to be there just when you came out? How do you suppose I happened to follow you?"

"I suppose," said Anthony slowly, "you wait there to look over the new bunch as they come through." *I want a job, a real job,* he thought, *but do I want it from him? Am I being wise to hesitate, or only cowardly?*

"I have to do it," Crider said, pounding the table, "or I'd never get anybody. And I'm not the only one. Labor's at a premium here, and the big boys have got it all sewed up. Now look, fella. Just hear me out, that's all I ask, and then you can make up your own mind. I represent a small outfit. We don't have maybe the last word in equipment and so on, but we're taking out uranium, more than I've ever seen before, and I've been around here a long time. We're growing. We have something to offer for the future, where these big companies just want a gang of little wage slaves. We—say, you're feeling the heat, aren't you? Have another drink, it's as cold as you'll ever get here. Good for you. Like I was saying—"

It was hot in the cubbyhole. Crider's voice droned on. Anthony's lungs lifted and labored against the close air. Crider got farther and farther away until he was

just a voice with two bright hard little eyes. A pulse of alarm began to beat in Anthony, a presentiment that this strange withdrawal was not due to the heat, or the suffocating air, or the after-effects of space-sickness. He got up, pushing the table over. And suddenly Mr. Crider's smiling face was close to his, and a great pale fist came floating toward him with a terrible deliberation that he could not by any means evade.

V

SOMEBODY was screaming.

Anthony heard it from a long way off, a fleck of sound in a thick blank nothingness. It didn't have anything to do with him. It wasn't Fern, or one of the kids. Somebody in the next building, maybe.

Deep. Down deep. How many slumber pills had he taken? Too deep.

It was a man's voice screaming. George? It was coming closer. George running down the hall screaming. Out, got to get out, for God's sake let me out. Nightmare? Fire? Earthquake?

Earthquake.

Everything shaking, the bed lurching, the long ominous sliding rumble of the thing rolling down the fault, sounds of the building falling, got to get out, get Fern and the kids. Fern . . . *Fern* . . . FERN—

"—isn't one of 'em enough? Listen. Listen, you! Shut up!"

Anthony choked on his voice, staring into a dizzy vortex where vague Ferns and Georges and apartments spun round and round on top of another image, a little iron box with men in it. The Ferns and the Georges and the apartments went away, but the iron box stayed, and the men. One of them was trying to butt his way headfirst through a wall. The sounds stayed too, the rumbling and clattering and screaming. It was not George who was screaming. It was the butting man.

Crider was looking into the box through a square hole covered with wire mesh. "Quiet him down, can't you?" he was saying. "He'll have us all yammering, if that keeps up."

There were six men beside Anthony. Some were still stuporous, but two of them were struggling with the butting man. They kept dragging him back from the wall and he kept springing at it again, shrieking to be let out.

"A claustro," said Crider disgustedly. "Who brought *him* in?"

Anthony could see the shoulder of a man who was sitting next to Crider. It was bare and glistening with sweat. "I did," said the owner of the shoulder in a you-want-to-make-something-out-of-it tone. "How the hell was I to know? Anyway, he'll be okay when he's out of the truck."

"Sure," said Crider gloomily, "for a while. And then the dome gets too small for him." He spoke again to the two who were trying to keep the claustrophobe from battering his own head in. "Quiet him down! What's the matter, can't you think of a simple thing like knocking him out?"

One of them, a tall lean man with a face like white leather, seamed and creased, glanced at Crider and called him a name. The other one, shorter and thicker but with that same washed leathery look, muttered, "Yeah, but I guess we better do it." He was the one who had told Anthony to shut up.

"I guess so," said the tall man. "Hold him." He doubled up his fist and swung. He swung again. The screaming stopped, and the butting. Reminded of something, Anthony put his hand to his own jaw.

The shorter man laid his burden on the iron floor. "He's better that way," he said. "He'd only drive himself nuts."

"And us," said Crider, mopping his face. "Whew! That's a relief."

The tall man flung himself at the wire-mesh screen. He tried to pull it loose to get at Crider. Crider watched him, and the man who was driving the truck turned and watched too, and they both laughed. After a while the tall man gave up.

"Crimpers," he said, to everybody.

"Dirty lousy crimpers. They don't run mines, they run death-traps. They have to drag men in doped and hog-tied to work for 'em." He turned on Crider again and cursed him until the tears ran out of his eyes. "I had a good job. In a year or two I could have gone back to Earth. Why couldn't you let me alone?"

"Ah, cool down," said Crider, not unkindly. "Things are tough for everybody around here, and I got to live too."

"Why?" asked Anthony.

Crider looked at him. "I don't know," he said quite seriously. "It's just a habit you get into."

The sealed truck rumbled and jolted along, pitching up and down over the drift dunes. The furnace wind outside gnawed at it, whining, as though it wanted to get at the men inside and drown them in the waste products of their own lungs. Anthony's fingers touched again and again the painful lump on his jaw. He watched Crider, safe behind the wire-mesh screen.

AFTER a time the truck slowed, lurched on again, and then stopped. The wind-sound ceased. Crider and the driver struggled with the door and got out, and then a heavy flanged hatch was opened in the back of the truck. "All right," said Crider. "Everybody out."

They clambered down. The claustrophobe had not come to yet. Anthony helped to lift him through the hatch, recoiling inwardly from the sodden weight of him, the limpness and the lolling head.

There was light outside, the smoky furnace glow of the long day that broke men's hearts with a hunger for the night—until the night came, too long and too black, and they yearned for day again. Anthony was conscious of a very small, very low dome, intensely hot and filled with the racket of machinery, but his attention was all on Crider. A knot of men had collected to see the new arrivals, and Crider had stepped aside to speak with two of them. Anthony went up to him and hit him as hard as he could in the face.

Crider's eyes popped open in anguished surprise. A small trickle of blood came out of his right nostril. A strange fever burned suddenly in Anthony. He lifted his hand again, but it was caught and held and wrenched around, and he was thrown to his knees in the native dust that was all the paving the dome had. He whimpered a little from the pain and looked hungrily at Crider.

"Well, I'll be—" said Crider between his teeth, and then hastily to the hard-looking men who held Anthony, "No, don't ruin him! Men are too hard to get." He kicked Anthony gently to his feet. "Just don't try that again, see? Now get over with the others."

They stood in a hang-dog little group, resentful, frightened, furious, but not knowing what to do about it. Crider spoke to them briskly.

"Let's face it, you're here, and you can't get away unless I take you. But I'm going to be fair with you. I'm going to give you regular working contracts with guaranteed wages and a specified term of employment. When it's up you'll be taken back—"

"Feet first," said the tall man. "Wages!" He pointed at the machinery, at the mine head, at the four or five ancient collapsible shacks. "Who's gonna get paid with what? Junk, that's all you got here. Junk machinery, junk buildings, and all you're mining is copper."

"Copper," said Anthony, and glared at Crider. "But you told me—"

"So I lied," said Crider.

The claustrophobe, who had managed to get on his feet again, whispered, "I can't go down in a mine. Not any more." He looked at the low dome over his head, and the narrow circle of it around him, and licked his lips.

Anthony said, "He only wants us to sign up so it'll look legal."

"Sign 'em or not," said Crider, "just as you please. I'm not forcing you."

One of the other men said suspiciously, "What's the catch?"

"Starvation," said the tall man. "He's

got all the food."

Crider shook his head. "Not me. You can have all the grub you want, I wouldn't see a dog starve." He looked around at them, spreading his hands. "It's just a matter of necessity. We've got a well here, but it isn't the best on Venus. It doesn't make all the water in the world, and if a man isn't working for me I can't afford to supply him, that's all." He turned around and walked toward the shack that had a sign on it, CRIDER MINING COMPANY, OFFICE. "When you make up your minds, let me know."

Anthony thrust his hands in his pockets. "I won't sign."

The tall man cursed Crider and came and stood beside Anthony. "If we hang together he can't make us. What's he going to do with seven bodies? That's too many to take chances with. If we hang together—"

"He'll have to take us back," said Anthony.

The five other men stood irresolute in the dust, talking to each other, glancing around, moving their hands emphatically. Mechanics and miners passed by them, men impregnated with the rufous soil, leached with sweating and boiled stringy with the heat, looking at the newcomers, some with a vague sympathy, some with a savage pleasure that somebody else was going to suffer too, some with no emotion at all. One of them said, "I'll give the hold-outs three work-periods." And another answered sadly, "Two."

"Well?" said Anthony.

The claustrophobe shook his head. "I know when I'm licked. It'll be bad enough without making more trouble."

He started away toward the office shack. Another one said disgustedly, "Oh, what's the use, Crider holds all the cards." He went along with the claustrophobe. The three that were left hesitated, and then two of them went, leaving the shorter man who had yelled at Anthony in the truck. He came and joined the hold-outs.

"My name's Linson," he said. "I'm with you."

"Holfern," said the tall man. He cursed Crider again, repeating himself with undiminished emphasis. "Two years. Only two little Venusian years, and I could have gone home again."

"Reid," said Anthony, without thinking. He walked over and sat down by the curve of the dome wall, beside a clump of the inevitable burdocks. The others sat with him. Their attitude said they were going to stay there till Venus froze over.

For a while they talked, angrily and excitedly, passing from the personal to the general and back again. Gradually their voices got lower and their speech slower, until at last they pinched out and were gone. Holfern brooded, and Linson seemed to sleep.

OUTSIDE the dome Anthony could see a narrow strip of desert and then a wall of red rock. The killing wind and the scouring dust had taken out geologic ages of their spite on the helpless stone, torturing and tearing it into shapes of static agony. It seemed to Anthony that the whole cliff was one great frozen shriek. He shivered and turned his back on it.

It was hot. He had thought that only hell could be hotter than the city, but this was. He opened his shirt. After a while he took it off. Next to him, the sleeping Linson had his head bent forward. Sweat dripped off the end of his nose, monotonously, like a leaking faucet.

Suddenly Anthony said, "It's crazy. It's absolutely insane."

Holfern started. "What is? "

"This. The city. Venus. Domes and refrigeration and canned air—" He fumbled for words, his head reeling a bit in the heat. Artificiality, that was it. Artificiality carried to its *n*th power. "Isn't anything real any more? What is the human race trying to do to itself?"

Holfern stared at him. "You nuts, or something? How could we live here if it wasn't for those things, and how would Earth get along without us?" He grunted. "You sound like my old lady. She was always honing for the good old

times she couldn't remember either, when people did their own cooking and kept their own little houses. Real!" He passed his hands over his face. "What's realer than this heat?"

The machinery clanked deafeningly, crushing ore and feeding it through hatches into giant bins outside the dome. Men drooped at huge control panels, or went up and down in the creaky mine lift. One rusty crusher was inoperative, and three mechanics peered and poked in it, banging it now and again with pneumo-hammers.

"It's the same on Mars," said Holfern dreamily. "Domes and all, only there it's the cold and the thin air instead of heat and carbon dioxide. I was there once. Wish I was there now. Seemed like you never got warm."

"I'm thirsty," said Linson, out of his stupor.

"Shut up," Holfern told him.

Anthony swallowed, and his mouth and throat were as parched as the ground he sat on.

Silence again, and time. Time intolerable under an unchanging sky. He could feel the dome quiver in the wind. He dozed, and started awake, and dozed again. Thirst became a private fire, an internal holocaust. A whistle shrilled. Men came from the mine head and the machines. They sat down beside the shacks and ate and drank while others took their places. Linson had waked. He watched them and groaned, and Holfern cursed. Anthony sat, and thought with a vague surprise, "This is torture."

"Look," said Holfern, and began to laugh. "We've beaten him. See? Look at him come."

Crider was walking toward them. He carried a sack in one hand and a bucket in the other. Drops of water slopped over the sides of it, leaving a little moist trail in the dust. His partners, or foremen, or whatever they were, walked behind him. The men at the table watched covertly.

"Beat him," said Holfern exultantly, and got up. He started for the bucket.

The foremen pushed him away. Crider tossed the sack down in front of Anthony and Linson. Squares of food concentrates fell out of it. "Dinner," said Crider, and smiled. "How you feeling?"

Linson made a grab for the bucket.

Crider sidestepped. He shook his head and poured the water carefully around the roots of the burdocks. "Sorry," he said. "I really am. But we have so many needs for water. Take these docks. We breathe out carbon dioxide and they take it in and give us back oxygen. We can't let them die. You see how it is."

Anthony's eyes were fixed on the wet spot soaking into the ground. He didn't see what happened. He heard a scuffle and a thud, and when he turned around Holfern was lying flat. Linson beat his hands together. "All right," he moaned. "I'll sign your bloody contract." He avoided meeting Anthony's gaze. "It's no use, you can see it isn't."

Anthony crossed his arms stubbornly. The dome was beginning to waver in front of his eyes, and Crider looked like something painted on water. Presently he and Linson and the others were gone, leaving only Holfern lying on the ground. After a while Anthony lost track of Holfern.

He dreamed of water. He dreamed of the reservoirs, the enormous man-made lakes that drowned the land between the cities. Billions of gallons of water rushing out of them along the mighty aquaducts, through the pumping stations, into the pipes, into the apartments. Millions of people turning taps, drinking, taking showers, running washers, flushing tanks at five gallons a flush. Millions upon millions of people, wallowing in water and never thinking about it. He woke up in a kind of weak hysteria.

Holfern was gone.

Anthony sat a while longer, alone, light-headed and suffering. Two or three times he started to get up, and each time he stopped, muttering, "I won't."

NOBODY came near him. Once he saw Linson and Holfern pass by at a distance. They seemed not to want to

look at him. There was a bad taste in Anthony's mouth, along with the burning and the swollen dryness. After a time he understood that it was the taste of defeat.

He began to drag himself toward the office.

Crider was coming toward him. Crider and a foreman. They picked him up. "I'll sign," he told them, and added, "Water."

Crider was hauling him along. "Water. Yeah, give him water, put a couple of cans in the truck. Round up those other birds, fast, and tell Jim to have another truck ready—"

His voice had a strange sound. It was the voice of a man upon whom disaster has fallen so suddenly and swiftly that the inevitable effects of it are still obscure to him.

The foreman said, "There's Everett, too. He was driving."

"Sure, Everett. Oh God, what a mess. Here, damn you, into the truck. Get him some water. Oh damn you, damn you—!"

Out of the awful lethargy of heat and thirst, Anthony asked, "What is it?"

"What is it? *You,* you—" Crider's anguish was so great as to be beyond any further profanity. "And I was sore at Everett about that claustro! Will he get a laugh!"

Water came. Water, life heaven. Anthony sucked it down. "What did *I* do?"

"You came in illegally, that's what you did. They've got the guy you bought your papers from. It's on a general broadcast, all over Venus. You didn't have your shots, you didn't have anything. You're a walking menace. And I've got to take you back alive and in one piece so they can find out what you're carrying and keep the rest of us from getting it."

"But I'm healthy," said Anthony, laving himself with water. "I haven't even had a cold for years."

Crider groaned. "Do you know how much UV we get through the cloud blanket? Almost exactly none. Most places have UV equipment, but mine is busted, and anyway it isn't enough. Do you have any idea how germs can breed under these domes, in this heat, with everybody packed in together and using the same air over and over again? Do you know—" His voice cracked. "Do you know you've probably ruined me?"

"Is that so?" said Anthony, and a light flickered briefly in his red-rimmed eyes. Over Crider's shoulder he saw Holfern and Linson and the others being loaded into another truck.

Crider leaned forward. With a plaintive earnestness that bordered on the tragic, he asked, "Why did you do it?"

Anthony told him, still looking over Crider's shoulder, at the dome and all that was under it.

"You mean you didn't have to come? You weren't broke, or in trouble with the law? Nobody made you?"

"No."

"My God," said Crider. And again, "My God!"

"And it wasn't any use," said Anthony. "This isn't any escape, it's the same thing only more so, pressed down and running over, *reductio ad absurdum.* Not even on the other planets—" He wanted to cry, but he had no moisture left in him to make tears. "Isn't there any place?" he asked desperately of Crider. "Isn't there any place a man can go?"

Crider told him.

VI

THE room was high up in the Justice building. The windows were discreetly barred, and the door had a magnetic lock on the outside but none inside. Anthony sat in the corner. He had a stubbornly closed-off look. Beyond the windows and far below he could hear the city, purring softly. It had got him back and it was pleased.

"Just a few more questions," said Dr. Eckworth persuasively. "We're almost through."

Anthony inspected his shoes.

"Really, Anthony!" said Fern, from

across the room. "There isn't any reason to be rude." She looked expressively at Dr. Eckworth, and from him to the state alienist, Dr. Hinojosa, and then to Mr. Horst, the special officer from Immigration. "You see what I've had to put up with."

"Well," said Dr. Hinojosa, "we've made a pretty thorough examination, and I don't think there's any disagreement in our conclusions, Dr. Eckworth. If Mr. Horst is satisfied. . . ."

"My department," said Horst, "is willing to be guided by your opinion as to the degree of responsibility involved. Fortunately there were no serious consequences of the violation—matter of fact, the local authorities were able to get hold of Crider because of it. So if you say Mr. Reid was—"

Anthony sprang up. His face was red and his voice was loud. "I *was* responsible, I *am* responsible. I knew exactly what I was doing, and why, and I'm perfectly willing to pay the penalty."

"Anthony!" cried Fern. "I know you don't care about me, but think of the children. Think what it would do to them, to have their father in prison!"

"A nuthouse is considerably more respectable," said Anthony savagely, "and I suppose it doesn't matter what that does to me." He glowered at Fern and Dr. Eckworth. "A conspiracy, that's what it is. That's one reason I went away, because you were trying to make me think I was crazy."

"Now, now, we don't use that word any more," said Eckworth kindly. "We simply say emotionally disturbed. Let me ask you one final question. Do you feel that you are willing and able, at this moment, to return to that place in organized society from which you felt it so necessary to escape?"

"No," said Anthony. "No, I won't, and you can't make me!"

Dr. Eckworth turned to Dr. Hinojosa and smiled. Dr. Hinojosa nodded and looked at Mr. Horst. Mr. Horst said that whatever they said was good enough for him. And Fern remarked with a certain tragic satisfaction, "If you had listened to me in the first place, Anthony, none of this would have happened."

"I'm glad it did," said Anthony. "In one way, it was worth it, well worth it." He looked at them all with a proud and tremendous satisfaction. "There were seven of us at Crider's. And I held out the longest."

"Ah," said Dr. Eckworth, and made a notation. He turned to Dr. Hinojosa. "What would you say to Rustic Rest?"

"Perfect. I'll make the arrangements today."

"Good. And now, Mr. Reid, please try to understand that we're—"

"You can skip the speech," said Anthony wearily. "I'm not going to make any trouble. It doesn't really matter where I go."

He had learned something else at Crider's. He knew when he was licked.

They took him to Rustic Rest that afternoon. It was a pleasant madhouse, and not at all what Anthony had expected. It was located on the extreme northern rim of the city, just before it touched the great central reservoir. There were many acres of wooded land there, carefully preserved, and once you were inside the high wire fence that enclosed them you could almost imagine that the city was not there at all.

The main building was a rambling unfunctional old structure that did not look at all like an institution. The resident psychiatrist was a pleasant bronzed young man in a sport shirt who did not look at all like a psychiatrist. Everybody talked a little while, and then Fern and the kids went away, and Anthony was surprised to find himself not wanting them to go, and asking them to be sure and come every visiting day. Then Eckworth and the resident, Dr. Buerhle, walked with him down a gravel path that wandered away among the trees.

"I think," said Dr. Buerhle, "you'll find the accommodations quite pleasant here."

SCATTERED here and there, with no attempt at order, each with its individual plot of ground and its indi-

vidual picket fence around it, were innumerable tiny cottages. They were painted every color under the sun, and decorated in every possible way. The little gardens flourished, and men worked in some of them, or tinkered with old-fashioned hand tools, or simply sat in the sun.

"The reality-image is so often bound up in men's minds with things like this," said Buerhle quietly. "We give it to them here."

Oh lord, thought Anthony, oh no! Maybe this was what I was looking for, but not like this, not like this!

"We may have come away a little too fast from the old tradition of the soil," said Eckworth. "After all, we were peasants and husbandmen a long while before we were urbanites. Dig in the ground, Anthony. Paint your house. Work with your hands. It does wonders for cases like yours."

Anthony did not answer. He was filled with a terrible regret for—for what? For everything. For the past, the future, himself. His feet dragged in the gravel.

"Your time is your own here," said Buerhle, "outside of what you spend with your doctor, or with me. Occupational Therapy will supply you with any tools or materials you want. Books, music, scientific apparatus, anything within reason, we will be happy to get for you."

"Thanks," said Anthony bitterly. "It ought to be fun."

"I think you'll like your neighbors," said Eckworth blandly, ignoring his tone. "I have some other patients here, and I've got to know the boys pretty well. By the way, your ex-employer is one of them—better caution him about Jennings, Buerhle."

"Jennings," said Anthony, and laughed. "Well, why not?"

"He grows vegetables," said Buerhle, pointing to the nearby garden patches. "You may have noticed that tall plant with the tassels on it?"

Anthony had not. He didn't care.

"It's corn," said Buerhle. "He's got them all doing it now. Jennings grows all kinds of things, even potatoes. The—ah—point is, Mr. Reid, he eats them."

Anthony looked up with a faint flicker of interest. "Right out of the ground?"

"It does seem too much of a return to the primitive, I'll admit—but he was so insistent about it. Anyway, please, no adverse comment. It upsets him."

They rounded a turn in the gravel path. There was an unoccupied cottage ahead, and a little group had gathered by the open gate. "Welcoming committee," said Buerhle. They joined the group. "Mr. Reid, Mr. Haggerty, Mr. Perez, Mr. Jennings—"

Mr. Haggerty, a small bright-eyed man, rushed forward and caught Buerhle's sleeve. Don't you think I could go home now, Doctor? My circuits are working perfectly, they don't hum any more, not at all. I mean, I'm not conscious of them, so that's the same as being sure I haven't any, isn't it? Oh, bother!" he added suddenly, as Mr. Perez reached out and tried gently to detach him from Buerhle. "Now look, you've shut off the switch." Mr. Haggerty stood stiff as a plank.

"I'm sorry," said Perez, and punched him on the other shoulder.

Mr. Haggerty moved again. He looked sheepishly at Buerhle, and Buerhle laughed. "Relax," he said. "I recommended you for another year this morning. Well, Reid, I'll leave you to get settled. If you want anything, there's a phone in your cottage. Coming, Eckworth?"

"No, I'll stay a while."

Buerhle went away. Haggerty looked at Eckworth. "I guess I laid that on a little thick."

"A little."

"What's the difference?" said Jennings. "You got your year." He held out his hand to Anthony. "Glad you're here. Throw your bag inside and come on over to my place. We'll give you a real Rustic Rest welcome."

Anthony glowered at Eckworth. "I don't know what goes on here, or who's crazy—I think you all are. But I—"

"You'll figure it out," said Perez. "Come on. You too, Doc."

"Thanks," said Eckworth. "Jennings is inviting you to dinner, Anthony. Don't you want to taste some real, unprocessed, unsynthesized food?"

"All right," said Anthony defiantly, "yes, I do."

Perez made a wry face. "You won't like it."

"Matter of fact," said Jennings, "I found I didn't like it myself. But I'm stuck with it now."

THEY took Anthony away down a narrow path that ended at a white cottage. Inside, the place was not too neat, but comfortable, fitted with an antique electric range and crammed with books—the old-fashioned thick hard-bound books that were all type and no pictures to speak of. Jennings moved a big chair and began to pry at the floorboards. From a hole underneath he lifted up a lopsided ceramic contrivance with a stopper in it.

"Made it myself," he said, "in Occupational Therapy."

"What is it?" asked Anthony. "A jug?"

"A jug," said Jennings. "And it's full of whisky. Real old honest-to-God whisky. Made it myself, out of my own corn." He chuckled. "I've got everybody growing the stuff now. That's why I'm stuck with the potatoes and the rest of the junk. Cover-up."

Haggerty had brought out glasses. Jennings began to pour. "You won't like this, either, at first gulp. But stay with it. It has its points."

Anthony stayed with it. And it did have its points, but he wasn't sure they were good ones. He could feel the hot raw stuff creeping through his brain, burning away barriers, doing queer things to his emotions. The others talked, but after a while he lost track of what they were saying. He only heard their voices, vigorous and cheerful, full of hope. The voices began to grate on him. It seemed unthinkable that these men could accept the shame that had been put upon them, and not only accept it but apparently thrive on it. Sane men, making a deliberate pretense of insanity so that they could cling to this ridiculous, this pathetic and unutterably sad imitation of a way and a world that were vanished and could never come again, a world they wouldn't even want to live in if it did come again. It was—

He told them what it was. Or at least he thought he was telling them. His tongue didn't work properly, and his thought-processes were confused. And then all the tension of disappointment and frustration that had been growing in him since—when? All his life, maybe. Or did it just seem that way? Anyway, it all clapped down on him at once in a wave of utter futility.

"No place to go," he muttered. "I've hit bottom."

"Good," said Eckworth. "At least you've stopped running away."

Anthony lifted his head. He must have leaned it on the table, because he had to lift it quite high. He snarled at Eckworth.

"You put me here. But I won't—I won't—" He had no real idea what he wouldn't. His voice trailed off, and Eckworth looked accusingly at Jennings.

"You didn't have to drown him in the stuff. If you're not more careful somebody is going to find out and take your still away."

"Made it myself," said Jennings. "Occupational Therapy is a wonderful thing." He chuckled, and then a doubt seemed to strike him. "You wouldn't, would you, Doc?"

"I'm here unofficially," Eckworth said. "Just as a friend. Pass the jug, will you?"

"Friend," said Anthony, sobering a bit as he got madder. "Fine friend you are. Sending me here to play with old toys instead of new ones. Give me a saw and a hammer instead of a television set, and you think I'll be happy."

"That's what you wanted, isn't it? Something manual."

"But not make-believe!" shouted Anthony. "I want to do something real."

"This boy," said Mr. Perez, "has a head start."

Eckworth nodded. "High I.Q. No genius, you understand, but intelligent. Too intelligent for the job he was doing, which of course is why he blew up. And a strong personality, extremely well integrated—which is why he didn't blow up sooner. Stability can be a handicap at times." He said to Anthony, "If you'd come to me when I wanted you to, I could have saved you a lot of trouble."

"I didn't want to be saved a lot of trouble. It taught me things."

"Um. Yes. About yourself. You found out that you have determination, and a normal amount of courage, and sense enough to know how far to push it. That's good. But you didn't find the other thing you were looking for—the important thing."

"Reality," said Anthony, and shook his head. He reached for the jug, feeling very sad.

"Of course you didn't," said Eckworth, and grinned. "You weren't looking for it at all. You were running away from it."

Anthony stared at him. There was a brief, hard silence, and then Eckworth said. "Shut up and listen. I'm not going to give you a lot of psychiatric double-talk, and I'm not speaking right now as your doctor. Just as one reasonably intelligent man to another. Jennings, if he squawks, sit on him. I want to get this through his head."

"All right," said Anthony, between his teeth. "Go on."

"Before you can find reality, you have to define it—to your own satisfaction if not to anyone else's. How you define it is what makes the difference between the 'normal' social neurotic, which covers nearly everybody, including me, and the true psychopath. When your reality-concept equates more or less with the accepted norm, you're allowed to run loose. When it doesn't, you have to be locked up, and not in a place like this, either. So you want to be extremely careful."

"But—" said Anthony furiously.

ECKWORTH drowned him out. "The most important thing is to be able to recognize a reality when you see it. That's what you refused to do. You ran all the way out to Venus to get away from having to recognize a few. But I think you're beginning to realize now that there isn't any escape."

Anthony got up. He started to say something, or to shout it, rather, and Jennings pushed him down again

"The calculator was a reality," said Eckworth. "You rejected it. Your job, the city, civilization, even your wife—you rejected them all. You said they were all artificial, and you wouldn't have anything more to do with them." He leaned forward, getting warmed up to his subject. "Look, Reid. Reality isn't something that happened a generation ago, or a thousand years ago. Reality is now, the contemporary matrix, the frame of reference you were born into. You may not like it. You may even think others would have been better. But it's real. You can't evade it, except by dying or retreating into genuine insanity."

Anthony took a vicious pull at the jug. "You're just playing with words. You can't tell me I haven't been living in a completely artificial environment."

"It is. It has to be, to feed, house, clothe, and employ the biggest population Earth has ever had. But how far back do you want to go? The first splay-footed human who made fire himself instead of waiting for the lightning to do it was exercising an artificial control over his natural environment. Clothes are artificial. So are houses. So were domesticated herds and agriculture. I guess if you really want to live in a cave we can fix one up for you, but it seems rather silly."

"Sit quiet there," said Jennings. "Listen to the doc. We can't have you punching his nose. We like him."

"I never wanted to go back," Anthony panted. "That's a lie." He glared at Perez and Haggerty and Jennings. "You all seem willing to do it, though."

"There's nothing wrong with going

back a little—far enough to get a new perspective and then start forward again on a different path." Perez nodded. "Dig in the dirt. Use a hoe and shovel. Get it out of your system. After you've done enough of it you'll think gratefully of those lazy but brilliant men who invented the well-sweep and the wheel, and started us on our long ascent toward the push-button. The future belongs to the mind, not to the back."

"So," said Anthony, "what's the good of the future? It'll just be more of the same. More push-buttons, more fairy tales on bigger and better TV sets, more gadgets to make human beings unnecessary."

"I used to think so," said Perez slowly. "But it isn't really so. We're awfully new in this universe as creation goes, but we're growing up pretty fast, all things considered. Infancy went on a long time, but our childhood was considerably shorter, say only about six thousand years, give or take a few centuries. Isn't that so, Doc?"

"We exhibited all the child traits. Impatience, megalomania, tantrums, a very imperfect grasp of realities and a tendency to reject all the ones we didn't like. In other words, wars, aggressive nationalism, segregation, trouble."

"But now," said Perez, "no—damn it, Reid, let me talk. This is my one ewe lamb of wisdom, and I want to walk it around. Now we don't do those things any more. Maybe we've got softer, but we have sort of learned to live with ourselves, and that's a symptom of oncoming maturity."

"We *had* to learn that," murmured Haggerty, "way back in the Twentieth Century. Or else, I guess the doc would call that a survival mechanism."

"We licked a few other 'natural' things," said Perez, as though he hadn't heard, "things like famines and disease. That's why we've got so many people nowadays. Where *are* we going to put them all eventually, Doc? I haven't figured that yet. Will somebody finally crack that problem of the ultra-speed drive and let us get out even farther? Anyway, Reid, we haven't reached dead end, not yet. We've just got into our adolescence. We're lazy, gadget-happy, easily distracted by every outside stimulus, trying on one fad and attitude after another—worthless, if you like, but only apparently, not potentially. We'll be dragged up just as we always have been, step by step, toward adulthood. Only I'm not going to wait to be dragged. I'm going to help do it."

A THOUGHT was beginning to percolate through the fumes that filled Anthony's head, but he was not ready to accept it yet, any more than he was ready to accept Dr. Eckworth as a friend.

"How?" he said. "In this place, with you all gibbering at doctors so you'll be let to stay?"

"Sure," said Haggerty. "I'm working on a technical problem, and it'll take me another year to finish it. I blew *my* fuses, you know, because as a technician I was only taught to understand the function of one particular circuit on one particular type of machine. The other forty million technicians had to eat, too. But I wanted to do more, and finally the frustration got me. I developed circuits on the brain, quite literally."

"Same with me," said Perez, "only it was pushing buttons in a factory. Same operation over and over."

"I know," said Anthony.

"With me," said Jennings, "I was living in a mental vacuum and never knew it till I fell in."

"There you are," said Anthony triumphantly to Eckworth. "That proves it. I still say what we've all been doing is piffling and—and unworthy."

"Which is quite a different thing from saying it isn't real. If you feel that way, do something about it, don't run away from it. Here's your chance. There isn't much room for individualists any more, there can't be, in an overcrowded society where everything has to be organized right down to the last decimal point. We try—we psychiatrists, Reid, in spite of what you think of us—to

keep the mediocre minds feeling important and happy, and weed out the exceptional ones so they can do some good. But there are so many that we can't do anything about until they show themselves by rebelling against the norm of mediocrity that social organization has forced upon them."

He waved his hand to indicate the acres outside, the trees darkening in the late twilight, the little separate houses with the lights burning in them.

"We try to give them a chance to dissociate themselves from the conditioned mass-consciousness and discover their individuality. We provide places like this, an oasis away from all the pressures and stimuli and distractions that keep people from thinking for themselves. We give them aptitude tests. We let them read, and putter, and play with anything they want—and finally something emerges. Something new, something real."

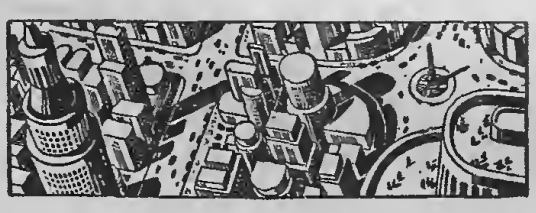
"Creative," said Jennings. "That's us. Breeding ground of the future." He patted his lopsided jug. "So far this is all I've created, but it's a start."

There was another silence. Anthony stared into his glass, and drank, and stared again. Finally he said, "All right, I'll go along with the gag. I still think it's crazy, but I'll go along." He looked at Eckworth. "I guess what you've been trying to put over to me is that the only true reality is right here, inside your own head."

"Something like that. Externals, above a certain basic level of necessity, aren't important. It's what you think, and how you implement the thinking, that matters."

Anthony put his head between his hands. "That doesn't sound nearly as exciting as running away to Venus."

"It isn't," said Jennings. "Not at first. But it's real." He laughed, and filled Anthony's glass again. "Just as real as the old-fashioned hangover you're going to have tomorrow!"



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How Long Will a SPACE PILOT LIVE ?

By GREGG GNARLEN

STRANGE as it may seem, probably the safest place in the Universe for you will be aboard a spacecraft hurtling through the void. Barring total demolishment by a large chunk of speeding matter—an event less likely than that any civilized earthling would be killed by an auto in any given twenty-four hour period—a space crew and passengers will have much less chance of a fatal accident than their friends and relatives on the planets.

Most deaths from accidents occur because the victim cannot be gotten to a hospital soon enough. In space, he'll be *aboard* the equivalent of a well-equipped surgical theatre. And if the operative technique necessary is beyond the skill of the ship's doctor, the patient can be kept alive till the vessel ports, by means of a device recently developed by Dr. Paul M. Zoll of Harvard Medical School and Beth Israel Hospital, Boston.

The machine, called a thyratron stimulator, is the size of a table radio and can be plugged into an ordinary a.c. electrical outlet. To keep a human body alive, two hypodermic needles are stuck into

the chest, one on each side; current is carried through to the heart and keeps that organ beating, with the other organs following suit with their own functions.

Handy? This may be but the first step to one type of *suspended animation.*

The most troublesome thing in space may be minor aches and pains, because those aboard a ship will probably not be given aspirin. Rr. J. B. Cochran, of the University of Glasgow, Scotland, has just found that after taking aspirin orally, a person consumes up to forty per cent more oxygen than normal, and after getting it intravenously may consume seventy per cent more. A large proportion of passengers with headaches could upset the whole ship's oxygen balance!

But how about general health? Will a space pilot's longevity be affected by his occupation? You can bet that governments and private corporations will be putting a lot of money into the health and training of their pilots and crews—and they'll pick them at an early age.

Recent tests have shown that animal life is unaffected by short periods of zero-G, and there's little reason to suppose that longer periods of no gravity will affect organic life adversely. Psychological effects, if any, can doubtless be overcome by conditioning.

GERONTOLOGISTS, the boys who are digging into longevity itself, can find no inherent reason why a human should die, or even grow old, at all. Of course, they know we actually do—under "normal" Earth conditions—and they've reached the tentative conclusion that aging, beyond natural growth to maturity, and eventual death are caused solely by the unceasing attacks of inimical bacteria invading our bodies. To back up this idea, they have caused small animals to be born and kept alive in completely sterile quarters.

The animals have rewarded them by staying alive and *young* for *more than five times their normal life spans,* continuing to play and breed as though they were truly immortal. And the experiments are still going on. . . .

How sterile can a spacecraft be kept in space? Pretty close to perfect!

But if you're thinking of signing up for the Space Corps, better not start smoking. That's going to be strictly out, period. It's the concensus that excesses —either of drinking, eating or smoking —are likely to affect maximum body efficiency. Spacemen can take no chances.

Adding it all up, it looks like a space pilot might live twice as long as the man selling tickets for the planets—a couple of hundred years or so, anyway.

COMING: THE GREAT SKYHOOK!

AMERICAN space scientists are awaiting the appearance of the United States Navy's projected super-balloon, *The Great Skyhook.* This gigantic balloon is intended to reach an altitude of 125,000 feet—14,000 feet beyond the present balloon altitude record set by the Navy in 1947. The "Big Hook" will carry an aluminum gondola packed with scientific instruments for recording the density and activity of cosmic rays. Controlled by special devices from the ground, the gondola will be automatically detached from the balloon and parachuted to earth after data has been recorded.

In this manner, scientists hope to solve the baffling riddle of the cosmic rays that ceaselessly bombard outer space, those mysterious rays that constitute a major threat to the space voyager of the future. Following careful analysis of the records, scientists will send aloft animals in small rocket ships as the next step in the vitally-important study of radiation effects upon living tissue. After the test animals are thoroughly laboratory-examined, human volunteers will be called upon to make the same ascent.

Beyond that, who knows? Perhaps the dramatic conquest of inter-stellar space will follow immediately, or perhaps many more years of painstaking study and tedious experiment will be required before the first space ship blasts off.

—Norman B. Wiltsey

Illustration by VIRGIL FINLAY

The Sound of Willow Pipes

By WILBUR S. PEACOCK

THEY came stealthily out of the night, sliding from shadow to shadow, leaving the shards of the gutted city thrusting bleakly at the sky. They came by ones and twos, fright clutching their bellies, but with the wind of adventure singing in their mind—and ahead, old Galman's willow pipes cried

Rog held a key to the past which opened a door to the future

a tocsin whose thrall could not be broken.

Rog heard. He heard and shifted on the hides which were his bed; and he could smell the odor of his family in the close room and hear their breathing. The fire had long since died into a faint smear of glowing coals, and only the faintest tinge of light came from the moonlight at the gut-covered window.

Those pipes were the cry to gather at the mountain cave; they sped the night and touched the chosen; and now a hundred beds would lie empty, while the owners crept to rendezvous with Galman and his knowledge—and certain death if they were seen.

For this was aftermath, and knowledge did not exist, and the world was dead and seared and broken, mankind brought to its knees at last.

Man was dead, even though he walked and talked and ate and bred; and the ancient stars looked down with icy eyes, uncaring, remote, patient and eternal. There were legends, of course, but they held no truth, and even they were dying, for none took up the singers' task and brought the past into the circle of the campfire.

And now the pipes sounded on the breeze. Rog stirred, groping for the stick he used in place of the leg which had withered almost to his hip. His father stirred, and he held his breath in terror, for the old man was of the Elders who had decreed death for any, except the guards, who walked from dark to light.

Then the room was still, and Rog crept closer to the hide door, his thin body trembling with strain. A spark burst from the dying fire, and he froze, then went ahead, wriggling past the hide and scuttling awkwardly through the broken wall and into the night. And behind, his father turned his head and watched.

Rog stood, and his breath came easier. Swiftly now, making no betraying sound, despite the crudeness of his crutch, he went along the shadows, eyes searching ahead, nerves like tendrils of pure force, seeking out the guards who watched against attack.

The moon was full, and its silver cascaded over all, limning the overhang of the mountain, cresting it with a pale halo. The town was small, the buildings leaning shells, gutted, seared and blackened, but oddly beautiful now in the moonlight which softened the ugliness of everything.

And ahead was the sound of pipes, soft, insistent and compelling. They sounded now, as they had done these past ten summers, and they could not be denied.

For these were the pipes of Galman—Galman, the sorcerer, the witch, the man who lived alone in the mountain's caves.

Galman, the ugly twisted little man who could read and write.

Rog caught his breath in memory, recalling that time so long before when Galman had shown to him a *book*.

He had screamed in blind terror, and the fear in him was something beyond any control. The book lay on the earth before the cave fire; and Galman held him close to it, his strength greater than Rog's, while Rog screamed in terror and prayed to the Tentacles.

Galman had struck him brutally, his voice lashing at the half-stunned Rog.

"Silence, boy, before I cut your throat!" His bearded face was a threatening mask. "Listen or die!"

AND so Rog had lived—listened and lived. He had heard and had not believed, for Galman spoke of things beyond understanding, of a world beyond belief, of people too numerous to count, of things called "machines" which worked as men and fed them and housed them. Galman was truly the sorcerer then.

He used the book, fearlessly, handling it gently because of its age. He looked at the black marks in the book and brought unbelievable tales to life. He showed things he called "pictures," and truly they had been wondrous, people and animals and even stranger things there to

be seen as though through small windows, but which had no depth and were smooth to the touch.

Galman told those things and disclosed wonders and then explained them; it was not a task to be done in one hour or one day or even a complete change of seasons. Time passed, and knowledge came and fear passed away.

Others came to Galman and his knowledge, recruited by guile and strength. To them Galman was no longer a sorcerer, but rather a man, crippled and shrunken, but still a man.

None talked but two, or rather, none tried to talk; Galman slew them as they raced from the mountain cave to the buildings and the Elders. It had been black evil then; for Galman had but leveled a strangely-twisted chunk of metal in his hand, and twice a streak of light had burst forth with a faint crackling sound. The two had died, holes charred in their backs; and the Elders had done sacrifice of a virgin that night to propitiate the Tentacles who had struck in clear sunlight, unseen, with sky-bolts seen only during storms.

After that there was no trouble. . . .

That metal had been a gun, Rog had learned in the passing months, and it was something legendary, a part of the chaos which had burned away most of the life on Earth.

He had held it in his hands once and pressed the firing stud; and even knowledge could not fully erase the fear in him when a bush flashed into ashes and a boulder glared and ran and cooled in the raw sunlight. He knew then that a man with this in his power might control the world.

And Galman, understanding, said, "Only a few may own these guns. Men used them wrongly once, and now the world is dead. Some day, you will fully understand."

Rog had tried; he had even tried to understand when the vags attacked the town, searching for food and mates, and a third of the defenders had died from spears and arrows. Galman had not fought, but had stayed aloof in his caves, taking no part.

"You could have saved them!" Rog had screamed the night after that bloody day. "Your gun would have killed many and frightened the rest away!"

Galman had not looked at him then; his gaze had been on the town where fires still smoked redly in the night.

"They are savages," he said simply. "I am of them, and yet above them." His bearded lips curled in scorn. "I have other plans for my gun and those who will kneel before it."

Hackles lifted on Rog then, and he saw fully for the first time the raw driving energy in the twisted man. He sensed the wellspring of ambition in the other; and for a breathless moment, his fingers hovered over the hilt of his belt knife.

And then the moment was over, and Galman was smiling his cynical smile, and his hands were conjuring a new book from the tattered clothing he wore.

"This year," he said, "we shall study the stars and the far planets and the space which lies outside this world of ours."

And so he taught Rog and the others, with some not fully understanding, but eager to listen to the forbidden words in the ancient books, the mere sight of which would bring about death from the Elders as having touched the beholders with the dark evil of a darker past.

YEARS had passed. Galman had grown more twisted each passing season, not losing strength, but his body warping in the disease which touched so many. His mind stayed clear, and he taught well, learning himself at times, bringing books and pictures and knowledge apparently out of nowhere, for his caves were bare and yet he did not leave —yet even so, there was always something new for all to study.

Once he used the gun. The Elders declared him a sorcerer and so to be destroyed. Men marched against him two hundred strong. Galman slew four, invisibly, almost silently. His sorcerer's curse against any who would attack him in the future kept all men away, and so

he was safe.

And now, Galman's willow pipes sounded in the night.

Rog followed the elfin sound, drawn through the shadows from street to street, ever-conscious of the fact that guards watched from hidden places for any movement which might betoken an enemy. The crutch tip was muffled with wolf hide and made no sound; but the night was still, and even the sound of breathing carried for a long way.

He felt strangely alone, as though this were something new, as though he and the world were set apart. And yet he could never remember a time when such was not the case. His crippled leg had been his curse, keeping him from hunting or fighting, making him little better than a woman to the others of the tribe. Only Galman had given him hope, and then in a curious way.

"You've a mind," he had said more than once. "Use it, make it grow. Let it reach out and grasp knowledge, and you shall be upright in a kingdom of beasts."

Galman had been touched by the Tentacles then, for his eyes had burned with a naked hate for everything that lay outside his cave, and his fist had pounded the new book he had produced that night.

"Read, read it all!" he had finished. "Absorb, learn, and slay any man who would stop you."

And so Rog had read and learned, and absorbed, until now there were times when his thoughts went beyond those of Galman, when his questions went unanswered. And Galman would rub his thin hands together and nod in approval.

"You'll do," he would say again and again. "You'll carry on."

He was mad, of course, damned by the Tentacles. But his knowledge was vast, and he gave it freely; and so about him gathered the chosen ones of the town, to hear him speak, to study, to reap the knowledge he planted in minds which were still young enough to think.

And he taught them well, taught of farming and metalcraft and building and science, a tremendous potpourri of learning which sifted into each mind, some phase always leaving a mark.

And when he found the mark upon that person, then Galman would point his skinny finger and say, "You are a farmer. Farming you will learn." Or again, "You are a builder, so you will learn of the hundred ways of building."

And such was his command, each person did as he was bade, studying and questioning and growing in knowledge as the months and years went by.

Rog had read of such men. Kings and Dictators were but two of their names. They had ruled over people, their slightest whim a direct command. And fear had come to him from time to time, so that he fingered the knife at his waist and wondered if Galman should live. And then he always remembered the world outside; and he knew that nothing could be more desolate, more bitter, than such an existence, and so he had stayed his stroke, waiting.

Until tonight.

This was strange, this calling of those who studied beneath Galman's tutelage, for all had met only two nights before, and to avoid suspicion, meetings were but twice each month. And yet there was the sound of lonely pipes, and they could not be denied.

Rog waited. huddling in a shadow, seeing the stretch of brush-covered ground he must cross to the cliff's base. This was always the hardest part of making rendezvous, for the shriveled leg hindered every movement in such terrain.

He turned, searching the rooftops seeking a guard. There would be no challenge, only death from a winging arrow; he cringed at the thought.

And then he went ahead, darting as agilely as he could from bush to bush, working his way outward from the edge of the town, his shadow squat and dark below his body.

And the arrow caught him in his twentieth stride, caught and twisted and, for a moment, pinned him firmly to the ground.

HE FLUNG himself, rolling, and a second arrow slashed at the place he had fallen. He did not cry out, but huddled, like a stricken animal, waiting for the shock to die away and the agony to begin. He could see the arrow, jutting from his leg, and he broke it, pulling it free. Blood was black upon his skin, but there was little pain. A rueful laugh escaped his twisted mouth. Withered legs had some virtue, after all; they did not hurt when wounded.

Rog sat, looking back at the town. It had been his birthing place, a broken remnant of a people long forgotten. His tribe was there, as it had always been. Probably, it would never leave. Starvation was there, and ignorance, and brutality. And now death had come from it to him, and only luck had saved him.

He could not see the guard, for except in attack, each remained hidden, his only task the arrowing of predators or would-be attackers. But the man was there, doubly-alert now.

Rog crawled. He scuttled ahead, crutch dragging from the thong at his shoulder, his wound burning a bit now. He went ahead, hugging the ground; and now he was beyond bow shot, and the cliff face was close at hand.

He came erect, bracing himself on the crutch, eagerness burning in him. He could feel the thudding of his heart, and he wondered why Galman had given his call this night. Ahead was the curtain of dim light which was the cave mouth; and even as he looked, the hunched Galman came into sight, standing and staring at the town. He turned at the clatter of a pebble beneath Rog's crutch, and the gun was naked in his hand.

"Come out of the shadows," he snapped.

Rog shuffled into view, and the gun lowered slowly. Galman nodded, then swung his gaze back to the shattered city.

"You're about the last," he said tiredly. "Come on, we've only a few minutes at most."

He led the way into the cave, where two lamps flickered greasily and the shadows watched from far corners. It was then that Rog saw Won upon the floor, slack and lifeless; and instinct did what his mind could not order. His knife came free and was wicked and deadly in the yellow light.

"You killed him!" he said, and already he was circling for the first thrust.

This then was the way of all things. Truly Galman was a sorcerer, feeding upon the bodies of the young. His books and his stories and his pictures had been but part of his scheme to gather youth about him, to fatten and feed on it when the need arose.

Galman saw the knife, but gave it no heed. He was past Won now; and where there had been only the rough black stone of the cave wall was now an opening. It led into darkness, and from it sighed the faintest whisper of sound.

"Don't be a fool, Rog," he snapped. "I wish you no harm. Won is only stunned; he'll wake up and be none the worse for what happened."

Rog could feel the tightness of his breath, and the ache in his wounded leg was a dull throbbing. He went forward, bent without taking his gaze from Galman, and his free hand found the throat pulse in Won's body.

"All right," he said, "he is alive." His gaze narrowed. "But where are the others?"

"In there," Galman gestured to the new break in the cavern wall.

A drum began to talk.

It spoke softly, and then in growing anger, until its brittle thunder filled the night. Hard hands beat at it; and a hundred men would come running to do battle, for this was the rallying cry of the city.

Rog whirled, forgetting Galman, and stumbled to the cave entrance. He could see them now, springing into sight like fireflies, each torch to mark another warrior come from warm bed and into battle mind.

"The vags!" Rog cried, and Galman's words breathed at his back.

"Not the vags, Rog," Galman whispered, and faint mockery twisted bitter-

ness into his words.

"But—"

"They rally to slay me," Galman said simply.

"But they tried before, and—"

"And failed!" Galman sighed. "Apes against man, man against Homo Superior." He touched the boy's shoulder. "We've a few minutes before they gather courage to charge the cave."

Rog shook himself free, bewilderment in his eyes. His knife was at Galman's belly. "I don't understand," he said, his fingers tightening on his weapon.

GALMAN shrugged. "Won fooled me, as he did the rest of you," he said simply. "He played the spy for the Elders; and so tonight your men will rally and slay me for a sorcerer, or so they think."

They could hear the cries now, as the city men gathered their courage and kneaded it into shape. A scant handful of minutes remained.

"Where are the others?" Rog said, and his voice was a thin whisper. The point of his knife urged Galman. "I want to see them."

Galman hesitated, then shrugged and led the way. He caught up a lamp, and his shadow scuttled spiderlike at his feet. Rog shivered, not knowing why. Values had changed. Superstition fought against knowledge; and each moment made Galman less a man and more some dread thing out of a Tentacle hell.

Lamplight reached ahead and marked the floor of the new exit from the cave. It spread in a flickering wash, and Rog saw then that what he had thought was a rocky wall was instead a cleverly-fashioned door of stone. Now it was swung back, and ahead was a tunnel, man-made and twenty steps deep.

"Nothing you can do will stop my knife-stroke," Rog warned, and Galman chuckled grimly.

"Everything is done," he said evenly. "I waited only for you."

Drum sound was louder now, building, solidifying. Rog glanced backward, seeing the torches grouping, coalescing. Time was running out.

And then he was in the tunnel, following Galman. The drums faded and the echoes of their steps were muffled. The walls were smooth, of fitted stones, and sweat hung darkly on them.

"What is this place?" Rog whispered.

And for answer Galman reached to one side and touched a protruding button on the wall.

They were at the tunnel mouth then, and when the light sprang into being it was like noontime, only softer, without glare.

"This is my world," Galman said softly.

To either side, barely a man's stride in width, curved an aisle, one side of stones, cunningly fitted and racing higher than the light, the other side a dully shining wall of metal which spread and curved away and too reached upward past the ring of lights.

Other than that there was nothing.

That is, except the round door in the metal wall ahead.

"In," Galman said, and impatience was edging his tone.

He went nimbly up the few steps to the doorway, then reached a hand to aid Rog. Wonderingly, Rog permitted himself to be aided upward.

Perspiration clung to him, and he shivered unconsciously. Galman was a withered gnome, mockery in his shadowed eyes. And then they stood together on a metal floor, and the drum sound was a muted heartbeat.

"This way," Galman said.

He turned away, ignoring the blade at his back, and scuttled crablike down the metal tunnel. His hands caught at the rungs of a ladder, and he climbed upward, leading.

Rog followed, sheathing his knife, feeling strangely futile. Galman had no fear of him; and suddenly, his own fear was gone, replaced by curiosity.

He climbed, hastened by Galman's whispers. The walls were smooth and dully gleaming, without a break except at the ladder top. Then a door breached the wall; and Galman swung through,

waiting for Rog to join him.

Rog, too, swung through, and rested, panting. The arrow wound was a dull throbbing, and the ladder climb had been awkward and strength-consuming because of his withered leg.

And then he saw what lay ahead, and he felt fear.

They lay in great rows from side to side of the room. Straps held them tightly, and they rested on strange beds which looked soft and cushioning. Side by side and row on row, they lay, Rak and Jan and Ferb and Nark and a hundred others of the town.

"They aren't dead," Galman said. "They will wake presently."

Rog whirled, seeing the gun naked now in Galman's hand. It menaced him, and memory stirred. Terror caught his heart.

"Why?" he asked. "Are they food?"

Galman's mouth was a thin straight line.

"Food!" he whispered. "Dear God, and you are the one I have chosen to follow me!"

He shook his head as though in answer to an unspoken question, and then the gun drove Rog back toward the ladder.

"Climb down," he said. When Rog had backed down the ladder, he too scuttled downward, advancing nimbly, the gun always alert. They went along the corridor, and then across and into the rocky tunnel which led to the mountain cave. Drum sound caught and held them, and now it was closer, building strength and courage. The townsmen would attack at its final crescendo.

"He's gone!" Rog cried, and Galman barely flicked a glance at where Won had lain.

"It is better so," he said, then motioned Rog to the cave's mouth. "I've much to say, and only a few moments," he finished. "One year more I wanted, but a single year, and then perhaps you would not think of me as a sorcerer."

"They sleep," Rog said. "Like worms poisoned by spiders, they sleep, and the new spiders shall dine on them."

Galman slashed him across the face with a hard hand, driving him back against the wall. Drums rolled at them; and now the torchlight was spreading and thinning into a battle line against the cave.

"Shut up, you fool!" He struck again. and Rog slumped, half-dazed.

Only the gun held him away from Galman, and in him even then was the knowledge that its menace could not last too long.

"Kill me," he whispered, "or I'll kill you!"

AN ARROW smashed on a stone at the cave mouth, and another struck and ricocheted with a keening wail. Cries were growing outside, and the drum beat was almost full.

Galman ignored all but Rog, and his voice was clear and smooth. "I took you, Rog," he said, "because of your mind. You could grasp knowledge and retain and use it." He scowled. "There were others as intelligent, but I wanted a cripple—a cripple like myself.

"I taught you to read and write, to study and understand. I did not expect a miracle, for I remembered my own youth. And you developed, even as I did so many years ago."

More arrows came, one winging into the cave mouth and clattering against a far wall. Neither moved, and now the gun was forgotten, and Galman was remembering and speaking and teaching; and the thrall of years could not be broken for Rog.

"I'll tell this fast," Galman said. "I thought to take another year, and so give you full knowledge and understanding. I cannot do it now. I can do nothing now but escape."

"Escape?" Rog whispered.

Galman nodded. "Now listen and try to understand," he said. "This is a story you will not find in books." He licked dry lips. "When the world died in its final wars, when men returned to savagery and ignorance, there was still hope for them.

"In the last years of the war, a great many men, scientists and artisans and

religious teachers, gathered together and made a final plan for survival. They thought to flee the Earth and seek another world on which to live. Thousands of them worked, not in one place, but in dozens of places. If necessary, they killed to gain the things they needed. Africa and Asia and Europe and Australia and America, each of them were represented. They built great ships, utilizing all the knowledge at their command, thinking to fly into space.

"And all their planning went for naught, for most of them died in the final blow of the war. They died, and so the world died too; generations yet unborn were doomed to savagery and final death upon a planet seared and worn and ugly. Only a few were left to carry on, and they were not enough to carry through such a plan.

"But love for mankind lay in these people, and so they evolved a plan. Great it was, even though none of the planners would ever live to see it finished. Science was dead, and the garnering of knowledge was denied and uprooted, those who sought it burned at the stake.

"But the plan lived. It was dormant for generations, burning only to a few, passed along from man to man and woman to woman, in the hopes that some day it could fan to bright life and hope.

"And the plan was this. From father to son, from son to pupil, knowledge was given. Youth was gathered, youth with its mind still unfettered, still open to learning. Knowledge was given, secretly and fully, but without any final understanding of what was to come. Youth was taught the crafts and knowledge of the ancients, so that all which was learned could some day be applied in a practical way."

Galman's voice ceased, and he swung crablike into the cave opening. The gun sang softly in his hand, and death walked among the attackers. The drumbeat faltered, and arrows ceased their flight, and the line broke and retreated.

"Apes!" Galman said, and swung again to Rog. "There are some of us left—not many, I imagine, for I've met but two in my lifetime. But there are ships, hidden and waiting, and the hope of humanity lies in them."

He leaned against the wall, as though suddenly drained of strength. "This coming year was to be the last," he said. "I planned to teach you what little more I know. I planned to leave you with a task yet unfinished."

"And you?" Rog asked harshly.

"Me!" Galman straightened. "That is one of the ships inside the mountain. On it, I shall flee this Earth. In all probability it shall be my tomb, for I, like you, am crippled, and only the strong can survive."

His free hand twisted a pouch from his belt and dropped it on the floor.

"In the pouch are three gold plates," he said. "Should others see them, they will see only that they are in the shape of a Tentacles talisman. But there is writing on the plates, words which give the locations of other ships. When I chose you as the one to whom I would teach the most, I thought that you would take my place upon Earth, until such time as you either died or finished a task set for you by planners of centuries ago. I cannot finish my teaching task now; but then each ship has books, and you have the mind and intelligence to understand. You can do for yourself what I haven't the time to do. You can find a ship and the youth and the plans, crippled though you are."

The drums began again, and now Galman was almost through, his reaching hand gentle on Rog's shoulder.

"You and I are not destined for the stars," he said. "Only the strong may go, and even then, some shall perish. But of the hundred on each ship, many will live to start another world to living. That is the plan, and it is good, and it will be done."

BENDING, he laid the gun atop the pouch, and swung away. He was shrunken and crablike from the disease which had ravaged his frame. But there was dignity in him, too. He stopped at the tunnel mouth, looking back.

"It is your choice, Rog," he said. The wall came shut and he was gone.

Rog's hand darted for the gun, and it came up, centering on the closed rocky door. He could slay Galman yet, could release his friends. He could save those with whom he had grown and lived, and they would not wake—if Galman spoke the truth—in a ship hurtling toward another world.

Yes, he could do that, and he would be the big man of the tribe, greater even than he had dreamed, for now he owned a gun, and nothing on Earth could stand against it.

But his finger could not press the firing stud, and the gun was mute. He stood, half-crouched, and his thoughts were a whirling maelstrom that would not cease.

And the drums began to talk again.

Without thinking, without volition, Rog scooped up the pouch and fled the cave. Stumbling, seeking shadows, he went along the cliff and away from the cave and its attackers. He held the gun in readiness, and his heart was a thudding hammer that beat harder with each passing moment.

He ran, stumbled and fell, picked himself up, and the cave and its cliff were far behind.

He fell at last, looking back, and the drums lifted sound for a final charge.

The mountain broke, it split at the top, and rock rained and avalanched and burst asunder. Light gushed forth; and then a sleek shining pointed cylinder lifted on a tail of flame and sprang into the sky. Noise came, a pounding sigh of sound; and the ship lifted and wrenched itself away from its tomb, going upward, seeking destiny, searching for a future planned a thousand years before by men whose dreams were greater than their strength.

And then the ship was gone, twinkling and fading into the sky, another star against billions.

Men cried out in fear and panic in the night, men like apes, who even now were scrambling back to the safety of their ruined town. There would be wailings and threats and tears, for the children were gone; but the people would live and breed and die in ignorance.

And Rog, sitting beside a smooth boulder, felt the tears upon his face, and there was no shame in him. He was with Galman and the others, and yet he was Earthbound.

Adventure cried to him, and he could not answer.

He felt the weight of the pouch in his hand, and laying the gun aside, he drew the strings and found the golden plates. Words were there, and he read them in the moonlight. Resolution came, and he straightened, thrusting the gun into the belt at his waist. He replaced the plates in the pouch, and his fingers found something else and drew it forth.

Eight they were in number, each of a different length, and all skillfully fastened together. They were worn, but their notes were true, and he could learn to play the pipes as well as Galman had.

And so he came to his feet, bracing on the crutch, the willow pipes lifted to his lips. The notes sang softly in the night, lifting to the stars and a future for men to come.

They lifted, and Rog went ahead, toward destiny and another ship and another town and youth which could still be taught. . . .

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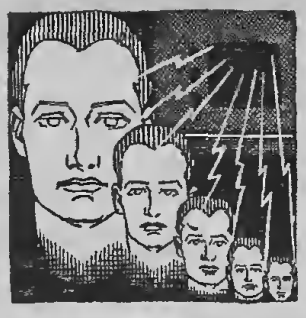
The SEETEE Mind

By GOTTHARD GUNTHER



YOU must have wondered what would happen if a terrestrial spaceship, travelling to some distant portion of our galactic universe, were to encounter strange beings with absolutely alien minds. How would the two parties react, and how would they establish communication—if any? We meet people with supposedly "alien" mentality even on this planet. You have only to make a world tour to see the pygmies in equatorial Africa, the Weddas in Ceylon or the Dravidian races in India. But it's easy to talk to a Dravida—if you know Tamil, Kanarese or any other of the Dravidian languages.

Some people draw the line even closer. I know a Texan for whom all non-Texan inhabitants of the United States are beings with foreign tastes and alien minds. But even a Texan can talk to a New Yorker—if he wants to. And if you want to talk to a Dravida you buy yourself a Kanarese grammar and dictionary. You'll get along somehow. Misunderstandings can be corrected, and are sometimes amusing. I recall once in Italy when I wanted cold water and ordered the waiter to bring me "aqua caldo." He returned with a pot of warm water. I shook my head and repeated: "caldo, caldo!" He brought me steaming water. When I refused again and shouted "caldo" at the top of my lungs I got boiling water. A look in the dictionary told me that "aqua calda" in Italian means *warm* water. "Cold" is "freddo" (frigid).

Such mentalities are not alien at all. They produce identical thoughts, but convey them by different languages. Human ideas are the same everywhere on this planet. Only the vocal and written expressions of them are different. That is why we use the general term "mankind." *Man* is spiritually of the same *kind* wherever you find him on this planet. Incidentally, though the modes of expression might differ to a far greater degree than they do among peoples of our world, the mind acting behind the alien system of expression might still be the same as ours.

Murray Leinster's fine story "First Contact" describes the encounter between a terrestrial spaceship and an alien vessel from unknown regions of our galaxy. The members of that alien crew possessed bodies physiologically unlike our own. They saw by heatwaves, and breathed through gills. Moreover, they were unable to produce vowel and consonant sounds in vocal speech. They communicated instead by frequency-modulation of variable wave lengths. Consequently any "language" communication went directly from brain to brain without the help of any acoustic, tactile, olfactory or visual medium. This poses quite a problem for translation. But as

A Challenge to Modern Logic!

this system of frequency-modulation with variable wave lengths is still a *language system*—even though of non-terrestrial origin—the problem is simply one of translation and is fundamentally no different from translating Shakespeare into German or Newton into Chinese. Leinster takes care to point out that the intellects behind the two different systems of communication—terrestrial and non-terrestrial—are basically the same. During the attempts to establish communication, Leinster writes, one terrestrial crew member "essayed a mild joke." It had to be translated into code numerals, then into cryptic groups of short-wave, frequency-modulation impulses; these went to the other ship and into heaven-knows-what to become intelligible. A joke which went through such formalities would not seem likely to be funny. But the alien saw the point. There can be no doubt that if people enjoy the same jokes their mentalities *must* be structurally identical, and only the mode of communication differs. Leinster finds this issue important enough to bring up again at the end of his story. Before the two spaceships part, an alien reports to his own skipper, "You see, sir, we spent those two hours telling dirty jokes." This is fairly profound. Only if two intelligences are akin to each other down to the very root of procreation are they really alike.

OBVIOUSLY the aliens in Leinster's story are "alien" in the same way as the Dravidas are to us or a New Yorker is to a Texan. Actually they belong to a larger, cosmic concept of *mankind* because they are spiritually the same kind as the terrestrial man, and form together with him a greater community of rational life within our universe. This raises the interesting question: *May we ever encounter rational intelligences of extraterrestrial origin which do not belong to that greater community of cosmic mankind?* Intelligent beings outside of that community would have a truly alien mind. In such a case more than the system of rational expression and communication would differ. Even the mind activating its language would be different and capable of producing thoughts which mankind, never having conceived, could never grasp in all the future history of our universe.

Understandably, the author of this article knows no more about the existence of such alien intelligences than anybody else. It is still possible, however, to answer the question of whether, theoretically at least, the existence of such alien minds is possible, and, if the answer is affirmative—as it will be—how such a mind must differ from our own.

To find out whether the existence of genuine alien intelligences (so alien that mere language translation would never establish a common understanding) is theoretically possible, we must first ask the following question: what are the basic conditions of existence for the human mind and all the other hypothetical extraterrestrial minds which follow the same rational system of thinking as we do? The answer is simple: in order to work and to recognize the world intelligently the mind must—in its own structure—*repeat* the basic properties of general physical existence.

Let me illustrate: if our world contained only the two colors "green" and "blue," and if our retina could react only to the colors "red" and "yellow," then we would not perceive our surroundings at all and would have no conception of what they are really like. In order to obtain true knowledge, our eyes must "repeat" the objective properties green and blue. Let us generalize from this and switch from the specific color situation to the comprehensive relation between general physical existence and the human mind. Everybody knows that the world is made up of matter. If you have more detailed knowledge—and readers of s.f. usually have—then you know that matter consists of elementary particles called protons, electrons, neutrons and positrons. To these, we can add photons, gravitons, neutrinos, and many others. The number of these particles is not important for us. However

in contraterrene forms of physical existence. Rational beings living in a seetee world must have a seetee organism and a brain with reversed neuronic reactions. As their logic repeats the functional characteristics of their brain-matter, the thinking of the hypothetical seetee intelligence must be determined by an inverted system of logical values. Where in Aristotelian thought processes the positive logical value is attached to a certain concept, a seetee being must treat the same concept as negative, and where the terrene minds use negations, the being from a contraterrene world will introduce positive terms of thought. The seetee mind is the total contradiction of the terrene mind. It is two-valued too, but it is contra-Aristotelian.[1]

Let us ignore the fantastic physical difficulties of ever meeting seetee intelligences. But if we succeeded in contacting a seetee race, no mere language translator would be adequate. Seetee jokes would not be our jokes, and seetee logical conclusions would not have validity for our mind. In addition to the language translator, we would need an infinitely more intricate gadget—a genuine thought translator.

[1]For the idea that personal subjects can only think in two-valued terms I am indebted to John W. Campbell, Jr.—G.G.

The seetee mind would be based on a total reversal of logical values. We are all familiar with a so-called partial reversal of logical values. This is a tactful way of saying that we are all liars when the occasion demands it. In practical life the logical values are "true" and "false." In a statement, if I replace the true predicate with its negation, the statement becomes false. Five minutes ago my telephone rang. I did not wish to be interrupted. Since I am able to imitate little girls' voices over the telephone, the party at the other end was greeted by a child's voice: "Mister Gunther is not in." This of course was a plain case of ly—pardon me—of reversal of logical values. The positive predicate "is in" was replaced by its negation "not in."

THE being with the contraterrene mind is in relation to us and our truth-conception "the absolute liar." But don't jump to conclusions. It may be relatively true that, if you ring the bell and the seetee butler in a seetee world tells you that "Mr. So-and-so is not at home," he is sitting right in his study and expecting you to come in. Such a simple case is exceptional, and your own experience in lying makes it simple to find out what is (for you)

The Thinker

MODERN logic may have begun with Aristotle, but it will not end with him. For 2000 years Aristotle's two-valued system has been so engrooved upon our minds that any other way of thinking is difficult and painful. A fact is either true or false—can there be any other possibility? In a pre-atomic universe perhaps there couldn't, but now we discover uncomfortable moments when a fact may be neither true nor false, but something else. Just as Euclidean physics, which explained nothing, had to yield to Einsteinean physics which once grasped are self-evident, so two-valued logic must yield to three.

The series of articles initiated here by Dr. Gunther, eminent metaphysician, are genuinely trail-blazing. Most of what is offered as the latest word in science is a rehash of stuff old to any conscientious researcher. This material is new, the first new concept in 2000 years of philosophical thinking. Trying it on may hurt like a pair of new shoes but once broken in you will find it more serviceable. And you may never think in alternative values again.

—The Editor

what *is* important is that all these particles, and any as yet unknown corpuscles, display three fundamental energetic properties. They carry either:

a positive electric charge
a negative charge
no charge at all.

It stands to reason that if the human mind produces its knowledge by repeating the basic properties of the world around it, it will also repeat in its own brain mechanism the energetic qualities of physical existence. Consequently, our brain is made up of a system of neurons that are equipped for two—and only two—reactions—a positive and a negative one. Now, don't stop my argument with the objection that if physical existence has *three* fundamental energy states then the repeating neurons of the human brain should be capable of *three* reactions. There's a flaw in such reasoning. Our mind is supposed to repeat the basic qualities of physical existence. These qualities are energetic. There are only two definable ones—positive and negative charge—and there is a third electrically undefinable one: no electric quality at all. Manifestly, while our brain can, in its functions, repeat definite qualities, it cannot repeat *no quality* in any definite way. This is why consciousness judges matter as impenetrable. There is something in matter the mind does *not* repeat. That is why the metaphysician says that the very core of matter is transcendental.

Our organic brain repeats in its own functional organization the two active properties of physical existence. That is a first and physical repetition. But if we observe the rational laws according to which our brain works and describe them in a theory of logic we repeat this basic structure of physical existence a second time in one consciousness. We say then: our intelligence works with basic concepts of thought which have two fundamental qualities. They are either positive or negative. True or false. Objective or subjective. Individual or general. These alternatives may be continued endlessly and they are referred to when we say that the human mind uses a two-valued logic. These two values (no matter what you call them) repeat in their turn the "on" and "off" positions of the neuronic switches in our brain. The latter repeats (as we pointed out before) the positive and negative electric charge of the particles of which our physical world is composed.

WE CAN see that all rational beings—terrestrial or galactic—must necessarily have the same brain-structure and use the same logic if they face the same universe and are physically composed of the same matter. The two-valued logic which corresponds exactly to the structure of physical existence as we know it, is Aristotelian logic. All rational beings—provided they inhabit our universe—are therefore "Aristotelian" intelligences. If we meet a foreign race, let us say in the neighborhood of the Crab Nebula, the difficulty of translating their language may be technically extreme. Nevertheless, the task will not be impossible because the mind which functions behind any bizarre pattern of language is still the same as our own. It is two-valued and follows precisely the rational laws that govern the terrestrial mind. Our friend from the Crab Nebula may have tentacles and breathe through gills, but his mind will follow Aristotelian patterns just the same. His is, spiritually speaking, the same *kind* as terrestrial man. The philosophic concept of mankind is not confined to Terra. It comprises all rational beings in a universe that is composed of one single type of physical matter.

This, however, is but half the story. There exists a theoretical possibility of contraterrene matter—c/t or, for convenience, "seetee." Contraterrene matter is a state of material existence where the elementary particles have reversed their electrical charges. Electrons which are known to have a negative charge in terrene matter will carry a positive charge if they belong to seetee matter, and protons would display the properties of negative electricity if they occur

the true statement. But if things become a little more involved, you will not be able to keep up with the statements of the seetee butler. The reason for this is that we are only *partial* liars and use only unconnected simple alternatives when we intend to make a false statement. The interrogation technique of the police is based on the fact that we are only capable of incomplete lies. Our statements are always an inextricable mixture of true and false terms and therefore logically inconsistent. The seetee mind, so far as we are concerned, is the complete and consistent "liar." All his statements are—judged by terrene standards—untrue. Truth, however, is more systematic consistency than anything else. It is the total absence of contradictions. The "lies" of a contraterrene intelligence are "true" to a seetee being as long as they do not contain inherent contradictions. They do not deny each other. They simply deny our terrene viewpoint.

I once discussed this question in a course on formal logic at a New England college. A bright young thing in the classroom said, "Oh, it must be easy to adopt an alien mentality. If I never forget to lie I shall actually be thinking in terms of a non-human intelligence."

"You are mistaken," I said. "The question is not whether or not you forget to lie, but whether you actually know the consistent lie in instance. What, for instance is the exact reversal of logical values in the statement: 'This color is green? It is 'not green' of course. We all know *that*. But what is 'not green? Is it orange, red, blue, yellow or what? As this case is still very simple I happen to know the right answer which would be given by the 'total liar.' It is 'This color is purple.' "

This is the only answer which will not involve you in contradictions, but to find it you will have to have very specific knowledge about our color-system. In order to lie about everything consistently you would have to know all about everything. This, however, is the prerogative of the divine mind. To know that purple is the logical opposite of green you need only know enough about one single system—that of color. The task of finding a seetee predicate becomes impossible for any human being if the array of negative predicates that contradict a positive statement is distributed over an unknown number of systems with different semantic characteristics. You want, for instance, to obtain two complete statements—one in terrene and one in contraterrene terms. The array of predicates is as follows:

The defendant is:

- guilty / not guilty
- fat / lean
- stupid / intelligent
- Republican / Democrat
- • / • / •

Now the statement: guilty—fat—intelligent—Republican, may be the terrene viewpoint. Then it seems that the contraterrene series of predicates is: not guilty—lean—stupid—Democrat.[1] This, however, is a serious mistake. Unless we know *all* the predicates for the terrene viewpoint we cannot establish a single predicate for the seetee mentality because one as yet unknown terrestrial predicate might cancel out any of the alternatives. Let us assume one of the later predicates, not in the above array, to be "Russian." This would automatically cancel the alternative:

{ Republican
{ Democrat

There ain't no such animal in Russia! But as we will never know all the predicates that are implied for a certain sentence by terrene mentality, it is impos-

[1]Note: the distribution of the predicates does not reflect the political convictions of the author.

sible for us to establish even one pertinent predicate that belongs to the contraterrene intelligence. The difficulty is that the series of possible predicates implied by a single statement is infinite, and to find the negation of a whole series you must first negate each predicate individually.

This is patently impossible.

It follows that all negations are indefinite and equivocal. This is amusingly illustrated by the famous "proof" of a medieval logician that a cat has three tails. It goes as follows:

No cat has two tails
One cat has one more tail than no cat
One cat has three tails

The infinite range of possible negations of a single statement is demonstrated by the fact that you could "prove" your case for any number of tails, because it is equally true that no cat has seven or seven-hundred tails. A similar problem of negation is illustrated by the following anecdote. An irate reporter once wrote: "Half the members of our parliament are imbeciles." He was taken to court and the judge ordered him to publish a retraction of his statement.

He next wrote: "My previous statement is untrue—half the members of our parliament are *not* imbeciles."

WHAT I want to emphasize is this: the capacity for logical negations which we possess does not carry us across the immeasurable gulf that exists between an Aristotelian mind and an inverted Aristotelian intelligence. And no other type of alien mentality can possibly exist, in terms of our present understanding of the nature of matter. The seetee mind is the only physical possibility. Its whole range of thoughts would be a total negation of our thoughts. However, we can never reach that hypothetical seetee mind by negation of our thoughts because any negation we perform remains partial and therefore equivocal and indefinite. Our negations simply remain *inside* our own terrene range of thought. We are not capable of that radical step of total negation which carries across the gulf from the Aristotelian to the contra-Aristotelian mind. No rational being can consciously perform a total negation because in order to perform it the intelligence in question would have to negate not only *all* its statements, but in addition negate the existence of its own mind! This radical reversal would be mental suicide.

Total negation, then, is that which not only negates all the contents of a certain mind but also the mind itself. In fact, total negation is the logical definition of death.

Our instinct of self-preservation always prompts us to minimize negations and to split them up into weaker forms of negative statements. For instance, a restaurant diner orders a cup of coffee without cream. The waiter returns saying, "Sorry, sir, we are out of cream—how about a cup of coffee without milk?" The diner implied that he wanted neither. This is the stronger negation. The waiter split it up into two weaker forms.

It is absolute death that separates the terrene Aristotelian from the contra-Aristotelian seetee mind. The conclusion seems unavoidable that the twain shall never meet. But this issue is not quite settled. The purpose of this article was to demonstrate that no *direct* contact between such minds is possible. No contact, that is, between a terrene and a contraterrene ego in which the Aristotelian self intuitively recognizes the spiritual alter ego of the seetee mind. But what about the mechanical brain as a mediator? This brings us to a technical problem: would it be possible to design a mechanical brain on the basis of a three-valued logic which would contain the Aristotelian and the contra-Aristotelian viewpoint as subordinate terms of a specific robot logic? This necessitates an analysis of the idea of a three-valued, non-Aristotelian logic. That will be the subject of my next article, "Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian Logic."

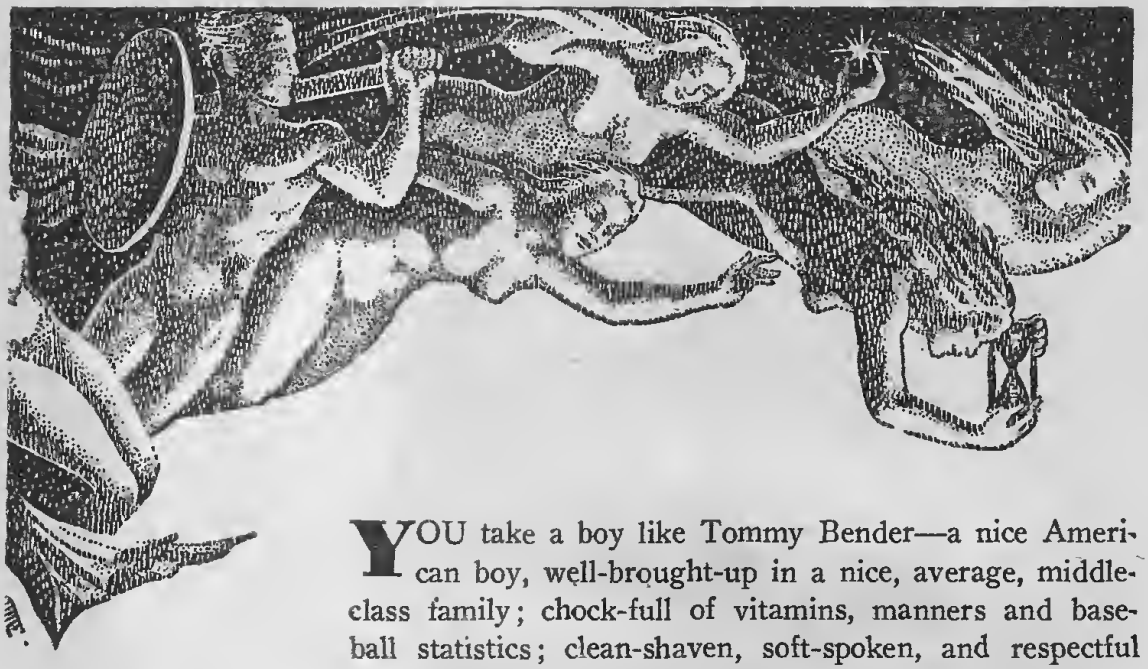
"I give you a key," said the old man, "and with it you unlock the door. . . ."

PEEPING

Tommy wasn't going to take NO for an answer,

at least not so long as he could read

minds where the answer was always YES . . .



YOU take a boy like Tommy Bender—a nice American boy, well-brought-up in a nice, average, middle-class family; chock-full of vitamins, manners and baseball statistics; clean-shaven, soft-spoken, and respectful to women and his elders. You take a boy like that, fit him out with a uniform, teach him to operate the most modern means of manslaughter, reward him with a bright gold bar, and send him out to an exotic eastern land to prove his manhood and his patriotism.

You take a kid like that. Send him into combat in a steaming jungle inferno; teach him to sweat and swear with conviction; then wait till he makes just one wrong move, pick him out of the pool of drying blood, beat off the flies, and settle him safely on a hospital cot in an ill-equipped base behind the lines, cut off from everyone and everywhere, except the little native village nearby. Let him rest and rot there for a while. Then bring him home, and pin a medal on him, and give him his civvies and a pension to go with his limp.

TOM

By JUDITH MERRIL

You take a boy like Tommy Bender, and do all that to him, you won't expect him to be quite the same nice, apple-cheeked youngster afterwards.

He wasn't.

When Tommy Bender came home, he was firmly disillusioned and grimly determined. He knew what he wanted out of life, had practically no hope of getting it, and didn't much care how he went about getting the next best things. And in a remarkably short time, he made it clear to his erstwhile friends and neighbors that he was almost certain to get anything he went after. He made money; he made

love; he made enemies. Eventually, he made enough of a success so that the enemies could be as thoroughly ignored as yesterday's woman. The money, and the things it bought for him, he took good care of.

For almost five years after he came home, Tommy Bender continued to build a career and ruin reputations. People tried to understand what had happened to him; but they didn't really.

Then, abruptly, something happened to change Tommy. His business associates noticed it first; his family afterwards. The girls he was seeing at the time were the last to know, because he'd always been undependable with them, and not hearing from him for two or three weeks wasn't unusual.

What happened was a girl. Her name was Candace, and when she was married to Tommy, seven weeks after her arrival, the papers carried the whole romantic story. It was she who had nursed him back to health in that remote village on the edge of the jungle years ago. He'd been in love with her then, but she'd turned him down.

That last part wasn't in the news story of course, but it got around town just as fast as the paper did. Tommy's bitterness, it seemed, was due to his long-frustrated love. And anyone could see how he'd changed since Candace came back to him. His employees, his debtors, his old friends and discarded women, his nervous mother and his angry brother all sighed with relief and decided everything was going to be all right now. At last they really understood.

But they didn't. They didn't, for instance, understand what happened to Tommy Bender in that Godforsaken little town where he'd spent two months on crutches, waiting for his leg to heal enough to travel home.

IT WAS hot and sticky in the shack. The mattress was lumpy. His leg itched to the very fringes of madness, and the man on his right had an erratically syncopated snore that took him past the ravelled edge straight to insanity. All he needed to make the torture complete was the guy on his left—and the nurse.

The nurse was young and round and lithe, and she wore battle fatigues: slacks, and a khaki shirt that was always draped against her high, full breasts in the damp heat. Her hair, dark blonde or light brown, was just long enough to be pinned back in a tiny bun, and just short enough so wisps of it were always escaping to curl around her ears or over her forehead.

When she bent over him to do any of the small humiliating services he needed done for him, he could see tiny beads of sweat on her upper lip, and that somehow was always the one little touch too much.

So that after she moved on to the next bed, and beyond it, it would be torture to have Dake, the guy on the left, turn toward him and start describing, graphically, what he would do if he could just get his remaining arm out of the cast for fifteen minutes some day.

You see, Tommy Bender was still a nice young man then—after the combat, and the wound, and the flies, and the rough hospitalization.

Dake was nothing of the sort. He'd been around, and he knew exactly what value he placed on a woman. And he enjoyed talking about it.

Tommy listened, because there was no way not to, and he wriggled and sweated and suffered, and the itch in his leg got worse, and the stench from the garbage pile outside became unbearable. It went on that way, hour after hour and day after day, punctuated only by the morning visit from the medic, who would stop and look him over, and shake a weary, discouraged head, and then go on to the next man.

The leg was a long time healing. It was better after Dake left, and was replaced with a quietly dying man who'd got it in the belly. After him, there was a nice young Negro soldier, somewhat embarrassed about being in sickbay with nothing more dramatic than appendicitis. But at least, now, Tommy could

keep his thoughts and dreams about Candace to himself, untarnished.

Then one day, when it had begun to seem as if nothing would ever change again in his life, except the occupants of the beds on either side of him, something happened to break the monotony of discomfort and despair. The medic stopped a little longer than usual in front of Tommy's cot, studied the neat chart Candy was always filling in, and furrowed his brow with concern. Then he muttered something to Candace, and she looked worried too. After that, they both turned and looked at Tommy as if they were seeing him for the first time, and Candy smiled, and the doctor frowned a little deeper.

"Well, young man," he said, "We're going to let you get up."

"Thanks, doc," Tommy said, talking like a GI was supposed to. "What should I do with the leg? Leave it in bed?"

"Ha, ha," the doctor laughed. Just like that. "Good to see you haven't lost your spirit." Then he moved on to the next bed, and Tommy lay there wondering. What *would* he do with the leg?

That afternoon, they came for him with a stretcher, and took him to the surgery shack, and cut off the cast. They all stood around, five or six of them, looking at it and shaking their heads and agreeing it was pretty bad. Then they put a new cast on, a little less bulky than the first one, and handed him a pair of crutches, and said: "Okay, boy, you're on your own."

An orderly showed him how to use them, and helped him get back to his own bed. The next day he practiced up a little, and by the day after that, he could really get around.

It made a difference.

TOMMY BENDER was a nice normal American boy, with all the usual impulses. He had been weeks on end in the jungle, and further weeks on his back in the cot. It was not strange that he should show a distinct tendency to follow Candy about from place to place, now he was on his feet again.

The pursuit was not so much hopeful as it was instinctive. He never, quite, made any direct advance to her. He ran little errands, and helped in every way he could, as soon as he was sufficiently adept in the handling of his crutches. She was certainly not ill-pleased by his devotion, but neither, he knew, was she inclined to any sort of romantic attachment to him.

Once or twice, acting on private advice from the more experienced ambulant patients, he made tentative approaches to some of the other nurses, but met always the same kindly advice that they felt chasing nurses would not be good for his leg. He accepted his re-

People in Glass Houses

SHOULD you suddenly acquire the telepathic gift of reading other people's minds your primary emotion might be one of embarrassment. All those little secret places filled with thoughts we'd rather other people didn't know! Tommy Bender acquired it rather unexpectedly. He had his first look inside the minds of a few girls and—well, it gave Tommy a point in time. He knew when a girl said "no" whether she really meant "no" or "maybe" or "yes." Kind of an unfair advantage. But things have a way of averaging out—a cliché with a hammer-blow of truth, as Tommy Bender discovered.

Want a look inside a girl's mind? This should be authentic; it was written by a girl.

—The Editor

buffs in good part, as a nice boy will, and continued to trail around after Candy.

It was she, quite inadvertently, who led him to a piece of good fortune. He saw her leave the base one early evening, laden with packages, and traveling on foot. Alone. For a G.I., these phenomena might not have been unusual. For a nurse to depart in this manner was extraordinary, and Candace slipped out so quietly that Tommy felt certain no one but himself was aware of it.

He hesitated about following at first; then he started worrying about her, threw social caution to the winds, and went swinging down the narrow road behind her, till she heard him coming and turned to look, then to wait.

She was irritated at first; then, abruptly, she seemed to change her mind.

"All right, come along," she said. "It's just a visit I'm going to pay. You can't come in with me, but you can wait if you want to, and walk me back again."

He couldn't have been more pleased. Or curious.

Their walk took them directly into the native village, where Candace seemed to became confused. She led Tommy and his crutches up and down a number of dirty streets and evil-looking alleys before she located the small earthen hut she was looking for, with a wide stripe of blue clay over its door.

While they searched for the place, she explained nervously to Tommy that she was fulfilling a mission for a dead soldier, who had, in a period of false recovery just before the end, made friends with an old man of this village. The dying G. I. had entrusted her with messages and gifts for his friend—most notably a sealed envelope and his last month's cigarette ration. That had been three weeks ago, and she'd spent the time since working up her courage to make the trip. Now, she confessed, she was more than glad Tommy had come along.

WHEN they found the hut at last, they found a comparatively clean old man sitting cross-legged by the doorway, completely enveloped in a long gray robe with a hood thrown back off his shaven head. There was a begging bowl at his side, and Tommy suggested that Candace might do best just to leave her offerings in the bowl. But when she bent down to do so, the old man raised his head and smiled at her.

"You are a friend of my friend, Karl?" he asked in astonishingly good English.

"Why . . . yes," she fumbled. "Yes. Karl Larsen. He said to bring you these. . . ."

"I thank you. You were most kind to come so soon." He stood up, and added, just to her, ignoring Tommy. "Will you come inside and drink tea with me, and speak with me of his death?"

"Why, I—" Suddenly she too smiled, apparently quite at ease once more. "Yes, I'd be glad to. Thank you. Tommy," she added, "would you mind waiting for me? I . . . I'd appreciate having someone to walk back with. It won't be long. Maybe—" she looked at the old man who was smiling, waiting—"maybe half an hour," she finished.

"A little more or less perhaps," he said, in his startlingly clear American diction. "Perhaps your friend would enjoy looking about our small village meanwhile, and you two can meet again here in front of my door?"

"Why, sure," Tommy said, but he wasn't sure at all. Because as he started to say it, he had no intention of moving away from that door at all while Candy was inside. He'd stay right there, within earshot. But by the time the second word was forming in his mouth, he had a sudden clear image of what he'd be doing during that time.

And he was right.

No sooner had Candy passed under the blue-topped doorway than a small boy appeared at Tommy's other elbow. The youngster's English was in no way comparable to that of the old man. He knew just two words, but they were sufficient. The first was: "Youguh-cigarreh?" The second: "Iguhsisseh."

Tommy dug in his pockets, came out

with a half-full pack, registered the boy's look of approval, and swung his crutches into action. He followed his young friend up and down several of the twisty village alleys, and out along a footpath into the forest. Just about the time he was beginning to get worried, they came out into a small clearing, and a moment later "sisseh" emerged from behind a tree at the far edge.

She was disconcertingly young, but also unexpectedly attractive: smooth-skinned, graceful, and roundly shaped...

SOMEWHAT later when he found his way back to the blue-topped door in the village, Candy was already waiting for him, looking thoughtful and a little sad. She seemed to be no more in the mood for conversation than was Tommy himself, and they walked back to the base in almost complete silence. Though he noted once or twice that her quiet mood was dictated by less happy considerations than his own, Tommy's ease of mind and body was too great at that moment to encourage much concern for even so desirable a symbol of American womanhood as the beautiful nurse, Candace.

Not that his devotion to her lessened. He dreamed of her still, but the dreams were more pleasantly romantic, and less distressingly carnal. And on those occasions when he found his thoughts of her verging once more toward the improper, he would wander off to the little village and regain what he felt was a more natural and suitable attitude toward life and love in general.

Then, inevitably, there came one such day when his young procurer was nowhere to be found. Tommy went out to the clearing where "sisseh" usually met them, but it was quiet, empty and deserted. Back in the village again, he wandered aimlessly up and down narrow twisting streets, till he found himself passing the blue-topped doorway of the old man whose friendship with a dead G. I. had started the whole chain of events in motion.

"Good morning, sir," the old man said, and Tommy stopped politely to return the greeting.

"You are looking for your young friend?"

Tommy nodded, and hoped the warmth he could feel on his face didn't show. Small town gossip, apparently, was much the same in one part of the world as in another.

"I think he will be busy for some time yet," the old man volunteered. "Perhaps another hour . . . his mother required his services for an errand to another village."

"Well, thanks," Tommy said. "Guess I'll come back this afternoon or something. Thanks a lot."

"You may wait here with me if you like. You are most welcome," the old man said hastily. "Perhaps you would care to come into my home and drink tea with me?"

Tommy's manners were good. He had been taught to be respectful to his elders, even to the old colored man who came to clip the hedges. And he knew that an invitation to tea can never be refused without excellent good reason. He had no such reason, and he did have a warm interest in seeing his dusky beauty just as soon as possible. He therefore overcame a natural reluctance to become a visitor in one of the (doubtless) vermin-infested native huts, thanked the old man politely, and accepted the invitation.

Those few steps, passing under the blue-topped doorway for the first time, into the earthen shack, were beyond doubt the most momentous of his young life. When he came out again, a full two hours later, there was nothing on the surface to show what had happened to him . . . except perhaps a more-than-usually thoughtful look on his face. But when Sisseh's little brother pursued him down the village street, Tommy only shook his head. And when the boy persisted, the soldier said briefly:

"No got cigarettes."

The statement did not in any way express the empty-handed regret one might have expected. It was rather an im-

patient dismissal by a man too deeply immersed in weighty affairs to regard either the cigarettes or their value in trade as having much importance.

Not that Tommy had lost any of his vigorous interest in the pleasures of the flesh. He had simply acquired a more far-sighted point of view. He had plans for the future now, and they did not concern a native girl whose affection was exchangeable for half a pack of Camels.

Swinging along the jungle path on his crutches, Tommy was approaching a dazzling new vista of hope and ambition. The goals he had once considered quite out of reach now seemed to be just barely beyond his grasp, and he had already embarked on a course of action calculated to remedy that situation. Tommy was apprenticed to a telepath.

THE way it happened, the whole incredible notion seemed like a perfectly natural idea. Inside the one-room hut, the old man had introduced himself as Armod Something-or-other. (The last name was a confusion of clashing consonants and strangely inflected vowels that Tommy never quite got straight.) He then invited his young guest to make himself comfortable, and began the preparation of the tea by pouring water from a swan-necked glass bottle into a burnished copper kettle suspended by graceful chains from a wrought-iron tripod over a standard-brand hardware-store Sterno stove.

The arrangement was typical of everything in the room. East met West at every point with a surprising minimum of friction, once the first impact was absorbed, and the psychological dislocation adjusted.

Tommy settled down at first on a low couch, really no more than a native mat covering some woven webbing, stretched across a frame that stood a few inches off the floor on carved ivory claws. But he discovered quickly enough that it did not provide much in the way of comfort for a long-legged young man equipped with a bulky cast. An awful lot of him seemed to be stretched out over the red-and-white tile pattern linoleum that covered the center of the dirt floor . . . and he noticed, too, that his crutches had left a trail of round dust-prints on the otherwise spotless surface.

He wiped off the padded bottoms of the crutches with his clean handkerchief, and struggled rather painfully back to his feet.

The whole place was astonishingly clean. Tommy wandered around, considerably relieved at the absence of any very noticeable insect life, examining the curious contents of the room, and politely refraining from asking the many questions that came to mind.

The furnishing consisted primarily of low stools and tables, with a few shelves somehow set into the clay wall. There was one large, magnificantly carved mahogany chest, which might have contained Ali Baba's fortune; and on a teakwood table in the corner, with a pad on the floor for a seat, stood a large and shiny late model American standard typewriter.

A bookshelf near the table caught Tommy's eye, and the old man, without turning around, invited his guest to inspect it. Here again was the curious mixture of East and West: new books on philosophy, psychology, semantics, cybernetics published in England and America. Several others, though fewer, on spiritualism, psychic phenomena, and radio-esthesia. And mixed in with them, apparently at random, short squat volumes and long thin ones, lettered in unfamiliar scripts and ideographs.

On the wall over the bookshelf hung two strips of parchment, such as may be seen in many eastern homes, covered with ideograph characters brilliantly illuminated. Between them was a glass-faced black frame containing the certification of Armod's license to practice medicine in the state of Idaho, U.S.A.

IT DID not seem in any way unnatural that Armod should come over and answer explicitly the obvious questions that this collection of anomalies brought to mind. In fact, it took half an hour

or more of conversation before Tommy began to realize that his host was consistently replying to his thoughts rather than to his words. It took even longer for him to agree to the simple experiment that started him on his course of study.

But not *much* longer. An hour after he first entered the hut, Tommy Bender sat staring at eight slips of white paper on which were written, one word to each, the names of eight different objects in the room. The handwriting was careful, precise and clear. Not so the thoughts in Tommy's mind. He had "guessed," accurately, five of the eight objects, holding the folded piece of paper in his hand. He tried to tell himself it was coincidence; that some form of trickery might be involved. *The hand is quicker than the eye* . . . But it was his *own* hand that held the paper; he himself unfolded it after making his guess. And Armod's calm certainty was no help in the direction of skepticism.

"Well," Tommy asked uncertainly, "what made you think I could do it?"

"Anyone can do it," Armod said quietly. "For some it is easier than for others. To bring it under control, to learn to do it accurately, every time, is another matter altogether. But the sense is there, in all of us."

Tommy was a bit crestfallen; whether he *believed in it* or not, he preferred to think there was something a bit special about it.

Armod smiled, and answered his disappointment. "For you, it is easier I think than for many others. You are . . . ah, I despise your psychiatric jargon, but there is no other way to say it so you will understand . . . you are at ease with yourself. Relaxed. You have few basic conflicts in your personality, so you can reach more easily into the . . . no it is *not* the 'subconscious.' It is a part of your mind you have simply not used before. You can use it. You can train it. You need only the awareness of it, and . . . practice."

Tommy thought that over, slowly, and one by one the implications of it dawned on him.

"You mean I can be a mind-reader? Like the acts they do on the stage? I could do it professionally?"

"If you wished to. Few of those who pretend to read minds for the entertainment of others can really do so. Few who have the ability and training would use it in that way. You . . . ah, you are beginning to grasp some of the possibilities," the old man said, smiling.

"Go on," Tommy grinned. "Tell me what I'm thinking now."

"It would be most . . . indelicate. And . . . I *will* tell you; I do not believe you will have much chance of success, with *her*. She is an unusual young woman. Others . . . you will be startled, I think, to find how often a forbidding young lady is more hopeful even than willing."

"You're on," Tommy told him. "When do the lessons start, and how much?"

THE price was easy; the practice was harder. Tommy gave up smoking entirely, suffered a bit, got over it, and turned his full attention to the procedures involved in gaining "awareness." He lay for hours on his cot, or sat by himself on a lonely hillside in the afternoon sun, learning to sense the presence of every part of himself as fully as that of the world around him.

He learned a dozen different ways of breathing, and discovered how each of them changed, to some slight degree, the way the rest of his body "felt" about things. He found out how to be completely receptive to impressions and sensations from outside himself; and after that, how to exclude them and be aware only of his own functioning organism. He discovered he could *feel* his heart beating and his food digesting, and later imagined he could feel the wound in his leg healing, and thought he was actually helping it along.

This last piece of news he took excitedly to Armod—along with his full ration of cigarettes—and was disappointed to have his mentor receive his excited outpourings with indifference.

"If you waste your substance on such side-issues," Armod finally answered his insistence with downright disapproval, "you will be much longer in coming to the true understanding."

Tommy thought that over, swinging back along the jungle path on his crutches, and came to the conclusion that he could do without telepathy a little longer, if he could just walk on his own two feet again. Not that he really believed the progress was anything but illusory—until he heard the medics' exclamations of surprise the next time they changed the cast.

After that, he was convinced. The whole rigamorole was producing *some* kind of result; maybe it would even, incredibly, do what Armod said it would.

"Two weeks later, Tommy got his first flash of *certainty*. He was, by then, readily proficient in picking thoughts out of Armod's mind; but he knew, too, that the old man was "helping" him . . . maintaining no barriers at all against invasion. Other people had habitual defenses that they didn't even know how to let down. Getting through the walls of verbalization, habitual reaction, hurt, fear and anger, to find out what was really happening inside the mind of a telepathically "inert" person took skill and determination.

That first flash could not in any way be described as "mind-reading." Tommy did not *hear* or *read* or *see* any words or images. All he got was a wave of feeling; he was sure it was not his own feeling only because he was just then on his way back from a solitary hillside session in which he had, with considerable thoroughness, identified all the sensations his body then contained.

He was crossing what was laughably referred to as the "lawn"—an area of barren ground decorated with unrootable clumps of tropical weeds, extending from the mess hall to the surgery shack, and surrounded by the barracks buildings—when the overwhelming wave of emotion hit him.

It contained elements of affection, interest, and . . . he checked again to be certain . . . desire. Desire for a *man*. He was quite sure now that the feeling was not his, but somebody else's.

He looked about, with sudden dismay, aware for the first time of a difficulty he had not anticipated. That he was "receiving" someone else's emotions he was certain; *whose*, he did not know.

IN FRONT of the surgery shack, a group of nurses stood together, talking. No one else was in sight. Tommy realized, unhappily, that the lady who was currently feeling amorous did not necessarily have to be in his line of vision. He had learned enough about the nature of telepathy by then to understand that it could penetrate physical barriers with relative ease. But he had a hunch. . .

He had learned enough, too, to understand some part of the meaning of that word, "hunch." He deliberately stopped *thinking*, insofar as he could, and followed his hunch across the lawn to the group of nurses. As he approached them, he let instinct take over entirely. Instead of speaking to them, he made as if to walk by, into the shack.

"Hey there, Lieutenant," one of them called out, and Tommy strained his muscles not to smile with delight. He turned around, innocently, inquiring.

"Surgery's closed now," the little redheaded one said sharply. That wasn't the one who'd called to him. It was the big blonde; he was *almost* sure.

"Oh?" he said. "I was out back of the base, on the hill there, and some damn bug bit me. Thought I ought to get some junk put on it. You never know what's hit you with the kind of skeeters they grow out here." He addressed the remark to the group in general, and threw in a grin that he had been told made him look most appealing like a little boy, meanwhile pulling up the trouser on his good leg to show a fortuitously placed two-day-old swelling. "One leg out of commission is enough for me," he added. "Thought maybe I ought to kind of keep a special eye on the one that still works." He looked up, and smiled straight at the

big blonde.

She regarded the area of exposed skin with apparent lack of interest, hesitated, jangled a key in her pocket, and said abruptly: "All right, big boy."

Inside the shack, she locked the door behind them, without appearing to do anything the least bit unusual. Then she got a tube of something out of a cabinet on the wall, and told him to put his leg up on the table.

Right then, Tommy began to understand the real value of what he'd learned, and how to use it. There was nothing in her words or her brisk movements to show him how she felt. While she was smoothing the gooey disinfectant paste on his bite, and covering it with a bandage, she kept up a stream of light talk and banter that gave no clue at all to the way she was appraising him covertly. Tommy had nothing to do but make the proper responses—two sets of them.

Out loud, he described with appropriate humor the monstrous size and appearance of the bug that they both knew hadn't bitten him. But all the time he kept talking and kidding just as if he was still a nice American boy, he could feel her *wanting* him, until he began to get confused between what she wanted and what he did; and his eyes kept meeting hers, unrelated to the words either of them were saying, to let her know he knew.

Each time her hand touched his leg, it was a little more difficult to banter. When it got too difficult, he didn't.

Later, stretched out on his cot in the barracks, he reviewed the entire incident with approval, and made a mental note of one important item. The only overt act the girl made—locking the door—had been accompanied by a strong isolated thought surge of "Don't touch me!" Conversely, the more eager she felt, the more professional she acted. Without the aid of his special one-way window into her mind, he knew he would have made his play at precisely the wrong moment . . . assuming he'd had the courage to make it at all. As it was, he'd waited till there was no longer any reason for her to believe that he'd even noticed the locking of the door.

That was Lesson Number One about women: *Wait!* Wait till you're sure she's sure. Tommy repeated it happily to himself as he fell asleep that night; and only one small regret marred his contentment. It wasn't Candace. . . .

LESSON Number Two came more slowly, but Tommy was an apt pupil, and he learned it equally well: *Don't wait too long!* The same simple forthright maneuver, he found, that would sweep a normally co-operative young lady literally off her feet if the timing was right would, ten minutes later, earn him nothing more than an indignant slap in the face. By that time, the girl had already decided either that he wasn't interested (insulted); or that he wasn't experienced enough to do anything about it (contemptuous); or that he was entirely lacking in sensitivity, and couldn't possibly understand her at all (both).

These two lessons Tommy studied assiduously. Between them, they defined the limits of that most remarkable point in time, *the psychological moment.* And the greatest practical value of his new skill, so far as Tommy could see, was in being able to locate that point with increasing accuracy. The most noticeable property of the human mind is its constant activity; it is a rare man—and notoriously an even rarer woman—who has only one point of view on a given subject, and can stick to it. Tommy discovered soon enough that whatever he was after, whether it was five bucks to get into a poker game, or a date with one of the nurses, the best way to get it was to wait for that particular moment when the other person really *wanted* to give it to him.

It should be noted that Tommy Bender retained some ethics during this period. After the first two games, he stopped playing poker. Possibly, he was affected by the fact that suspicious rumors about his "luck" were circulating too

freely; but it is more likely that the game had lost its punch. He didn't really need the money out there anyhow. And the process of his embitterment was really just beginning.

Three weeks after the incident in the surgery shack, Tommy got his orders for transfer to a stateside hospital. During that short time, though still impeded by cast and crutches, he acquired a quantity and quality of experience with women that more than equalled the total of his previous successes. And along with it, he suffered a few shocks.

That Tommy had both manners and ethics has already been established. He also had morals. He thought he ought to go to church more often than he did; he took it for granted that all unmarried women were virgins till proved otherwise; he never (or hardly ever) used foul language in mixed company. That kind of thing.

It was, actually, one of the smaller shocks, discovering the kind of language some of those girls knew. Most of them were nurses, after all, he reminded himself; they heard a lot of guys talking when they were delirious or in pain, but . . . but that didn't explain how clearly they seemed to *understand* the words. Or that the ones who talked the most refined were almost always the worst offenders in their minds.

The men's faults he could take in stride; it was the women who dismayed him. Not that he didn't find some "pure" girls; he did, to his horror. But the kind of feminine innocence he'd grown up believing in just didn't seem to exist. The few remaining virgins fell into two categories: those who were so convinced of their own unattractiveness that they didn't even know it when a pass was being made at them; and those who were completely preoccupied with a sick kind of fear-and-loathing that Tommy couldn't even stand to peep at for very long.

GENERALLY speaking, the girls who weren't actually *looking* for men (which they did with a gratifying but immoral enthusiasm), were either filled with terror and disgust, or were calculating wenches who made their choice for or against the primrose path entirely in terms of the possible profit involved, be it in fast cash or future wedded bliss.

Tommy did find one exception to this generally unpleasant picture. To his determined dismay, and secret pleasure, he discovered that Candace really lived up to his ideal of the American girl. Her mind was a lovely orderly place, full of softness and a sort of generalized liking for almost everybody. Her thoughts on the subject of most interest to him were also in order: She was apparently well-informed in an impersonal sort of way; ignorant of any personal experience and rather hazily, pleasurably, anticipating the acquisition of that experience in some dim future when she pictured herself as happily in love and married.

As soon as he was quite sure of this state of affairs, Tommy proposed. Candace as promptly declined, and that, for the time being, terminated their relationship. The nurse went about her duties, and whatever personal matters occupied her in her free time. The soldier returned to his pursuit of parapsychology, women and disillusion.

Tommy had no intention of taking these troubles to his teacher. But neither did Armod have to wait for the young man to speak before he knew. This time he was neither stern nor impatient. He spoke once again of the necessity for continuing study till one arrived at the "true understanding," but now he was alternately pleading and encouraging. At one point he was even apologetic:

"I did not know that you would learn so quickly," he said. "If I had foreseen this . . . doubtless I would have done precisely what I did. One cannot withhold knowledge, and. . . ."

He paused, smiling gently and with great sadness. "And the truth of the matter is, you did not *ask* for knowledge. I offered it. I *sold* it! Because I could not deny myself the petty pleasure of your cigarettes!"

"Well," Tommy put in uncomfortably, "You made good on it, didn't you? Seems to me you did what you said you would."

"Yes—no," he corrected himself. "I did nothing but show the way. What has been done you did for yourself, as all men must. I cannot see or smell or taste for you; no more could I open the way into men's hearts for you. I gave you a key, let us say, and with it you unlocked the door. Now you look on the other side, but you do not, you can not, understand what you see. It is as though one were to show an infant, just learning to use his eyes, a vision of violent death and bloody birth. He sees, but he does not *know*. . . ."

Tommy stirred on the low couch, where he could now sit, as the old man did, cross-legged and at ease. But he was uneasy now. He picked up the cane that had replaced the crutches, toying with it, thinking hopefully of departure. Armod understood, and said quickly:

"Listen now: I am an old man, and weak in my way. But I have shown you that I have knowledge of a sort. There is much you have yet to learn. If you are to perceive so clearly the depths of the human soul, then it is essential that you learn also to *understand*. . . ."

The old man spoke on; the young one barely listened. He knew he was going home in another week. There was no sense talking about continuing his studies with Armod. And there was no need to continue; certainly no wish to. What he had already learned, Tommy felt, was very likely more than enough. He sat as quietly as he could, being patient till the old man was done talking. Then he stood up, and muttered something about getting back in time for lunch.

Armod shook his head and smiled, still sadly. "You will not hear me. Perhaps you are right. How can I speak to you of the true understanding, when I am still the willing victim of my own body's cravings? I am not fit. I am not fit. . . ."

TOMMY BENDER was a very disturbed young man. He was getting what he'd wanted, and he didn't like it. He was grateful to Armod, and also angry at him. His whole life seemed to be a string of contradictions.

He drifted along in this unsettled state for the remaining week of his foreign service. Then, in a sudden flurry of affection and making-amends, the day he got his orders, he decided to see the old man just once more. Most of the morning he spent racing around the base rounding up all the cigarettes he could get with what cash he had on hand, plus a liberal use of the new skills Armod had taught him. Then he got his gear together quickly. He was due at the air strip at 1400 hours, and at 1130 he left the base for a last walk to the village, the cane in one hand, two full cartons of butts in the other.

He found Armod waiting for him in a state of some agitation, apparently expecting him. There ensued a brief formal presentation of Tommy's gift, and acceptance of it; then for the last time, the old man invited him to drink tea, and ceremoniously set the water to simmer in the copper pot.

They both made an effort, and managed to get through the tea-drinking with no more than light polite talk. But when Tommy stood up to leave, Armod broke down.

"Come back," he begged. "When you are free of your service, and have funds to travel, come back to study again."

"Why, sure, Armod," Tommy said. "Just as soon as I can manage it."

"Yes, I see. This is what they call a social lie. It is meant not to convince me, but to terminate the discussion. But listen, I beg you, one moment more. You can see and hear in the mind now; but you cannot talk, nor can you keep silence. Your own mind is open to all who come and know how to look—"

"Armod, please, I—"

"You can learn to project thought as I do. To build a barrier against intrusion. You can—"

"Listen, Armod," Tommy broke in determinedly again. "I don't *have* to know any of that stuff. In my home

town, there *isn't* anybody else who can do this stuff. And there's no reason for me to ever come back here. Look, I'll tell you what I can do. When I get back home, I can send you all the cigarettes you want—"

"No!"

The old man jumped up from his mat on the floor, and took two rapid strides to the shelf where Tommy's present lay. He picked up the two cartons, and tossed them contemptuously across the room, to land on the couch next to the soldier.

"No!" he said again, just a little less shrilly. "I do not want your cigarettes! I want nothing, do you understand? Nothing for myself! Only to regain the peace of mind I have lost through my weakness! Go to another teacher, then," he was struggling for calm. "There are many others. In India. In China. Perhaps even in your own country. Go to one who is better fitted than I. But do not stop now! You can learn more, much more!"

He was trembling with emotion as he spoke, his skinny frame shaking, his black eyes popping as though they would burst out of his head. "As for your cigarettes," he concluded, "I want none of them. I vow now, until the day I die, I shall never again give way to this weakness!"

He was a silly, excitable old man, who was going to regret these words. Tommy stood up, feeling the foolish apologetic grin on his face, and unable to erase it. He did not pick up the cigarettes.

"Goodbye, Armod," he said, and walked out for the last time through the blue-topped door.

BUT whatever either of them expected, and regardless of Tommy's own wishes, his education did not stop there. It had already gone too far to stop. The perception-awareness process seemed to be self-perpetuating, and though he practiced his exercises no more, his senses continued to become more acute—both the physical and the psychological.

At the stateside hospital, where his leg rapidly improved, Tommy had some opportunity to get out and investigate the situation with the nice old fashioned girls who'd stayed at home and didn't go to war. By that time, he could "see" and "hear" pretty clearly.

He didn't like what he found.

That did it, really. All along, out at the base hospital, he'd clung to the notion that the women at home would be different . . . that girls so far from civilization, were exposed to all sorts of indecencies a nice girl never had to face, and *shouldn't* have to. Small wonder they turned cynical and evil-minded.

The girls at home, he discovered, were less of the first, and far more of the second.

When Tommy Bender got home again, he was grimly determined and firmly disillusioned. He knew what he wanted out of life, saw no hope at all of ever getting it, and had very few scruples about the methods he used to get the next-best things.

In a remarkably short time, he made it clear to his erstwhile friends and neighbors that he was almost certain to get anything he went after. He made money; he made love; and of course he made enemies. All the while, his friends and neighbors tried to understand. Indeed, they thought they did. A lot of things can happen to a man when he's been through hell in combat, and then had to spend months rotting and recuperating in a lonely Far Eastern field hospital.

But of course they couldn't even begin to understand what had happened to Tommy. They didn't know what it was like to live on a steadily plunging spiral of anger and disillusionment, all the time liking people less, and always aware of how little they liked you.

To sign a contract with a man, knowing he would defraud you if he could; he couldn't, of course, because you got there first. But when you met him afterwards, you rocked with the blast of hate and envy he threw at you.

To make love to a woman, and know

she was the wrong woman for you or you the wrong man for her. And then to meet *her* afterwards. . . .

Tommy had, in the worst possible sense, got out of bed on the wrong side. When he first awoke to the knowledge of other people's minds, he had seen ugliness and fear wherever he looked, and that first impress of bitterness on his own mind had colored everything he had seen since.

For almost five years after he came home, Tommy Bender continued to build a career, and ruin reputations. People tried to understand what had happened to him . . . but how *could* they?

THEN something happened. It started with an envelope in his morning mail. The envelope was marked "Personal," so it was unopened by his secretary, and left on the side of his desk along with three or four other thin squarish, obviously non-business, envelopes. As a result, Tommy didn't read it till late that afternoon, when he was trying to decide which girl to see that night.

The return address said "C. Harper, Hotel Albemarle, Topeka, Kansas." He didn't know anyone in Topeka, but the name Harper was vaguely reminiscent. He was intrigued enough to open that one first, and the others never were opened at all.

"Dear Tommy," it read. "First of all, I hope you still remember me. It's been quite a long time, hasn't it? I just heard, from Lee Potter (the little, dark girl who came just before you left . . . remember her?)"—Tommy did, with some pleasure—"that you were living in Hartsdale, and had some real estate connections there. Now I'd like to ask a favor. . . .

"I've just had word that I've been accepted as Assistant Superintendent of the Public Health Service there—in Hartsdale—and I'm supposed to start work on the 22nd. The only thing is, I can't leave my job here till just the day before. So I wondered if you could help me find a place to stay beforehand? Sort of mail-order real estate service?

"I feel I'm being a little presumptuous, asking this, when perhaps you don't even remember me . . . but I do hope you won't mind. And please don't go to any special trouble. From what Lee said, I got the idea this might be right in your line of business. If it's not, don't worry. I'm sure I can find something when I get there.

"And thanks, ahead of time, for anything you *can* do.

"Cordially," it concluded, "Candace Harper."

Tommy answered the letter the same day, including a varied list of places and prices, hurriedly worked up by his real-estate agent. That he owned real estate was true; that he dealt in it, not at all. His letter to Candy did not go into these details. Just told her how vividly he remembered her, and how good it would be to see her again, with some questions about the kind of furnishings and décor she'd prefer. "If you're going to get in early enough on the 21st," he wound up, "how about having dinner with me? Let me know when you're coming, anyhow. I'd like to meet you, and help you get settled."

For the next eleven days, Tommy lived in an almost-happy whirl of preparation, memory and anticipation. In all the years since he had proposed to Candace, he had never met another girl who filled so perfectly the mental image of the ideal woman with which he had first left home. He kept telling himself she wouldn't, couldn't, still be the same person. Even a non-telepath would get bitter and disillusioned in five years of the Wonderful Post-War World. She *couldn't* be the same. . . .

And she wasn't. She was older, more understanding, more tolerant, and if possible warmer and pleasanter than before. Tommy met her at the station, bought her some dinner, took her to the perfect small apartment where she was, unknown to herself, paying only half the rent. He stayed an hour, went down to run some errands for her, stayed another half hour, and knew by then that in the

most important respects she hadn't changed at all.

There wasn't going to be any "psychological moment" with Candy; not that side of a wedding ceremony.

Tommy couldn't have been more pleased. Still, he was cautious. He didn't propose again till three weeks later, when he'd missed seeing her two days in a row due to business-social affairs. If they were married, he could have taken her along.

When he did propose, she lived up to all his qualifications again. She said she wanted to think it over. What she *thought* was: *Oh, yes! Oh, yes, he's the one I want! But it's too quick! How do I know for sure? He never even thought of me all this time . . . all the time I was waiting and hoping to hear from him . . . how can he be sure so soon? He might be sorry . . .*

"Let me think about it a few days, will you, Tommy?" she said, and he was afraid to take her in his arms for fear he'd crush her with his hunger.

FOUR weeks later they were married. And when Candy told him her answer, she also confessed what he already knew: that she'd regretted turning him down ever since he left the field hospital; that she'd been thinking of him, loving him, all the long years in between.

Candy was a perfect wife, just as she had been a perfect nurse, and an all-too-perfect dreamgirl. The Benders' wedding was talked about for years afterwards; it was one of those rare occasions when everything turned out just right. And the bride was *so* beautiful. . . .

The honeymoon was the same way. They took six weeks to complete a tour of the Caribbean, by plane, ship and car. They stayed where they liked as long as they liked, and did what they liked, all the time. And not once in those six weeks was there any serious difference in *what* they liked. Candy's greatest wish at every point was to please Tommy, and that made things very easy for both of them.

And all the while, Tommy was gently, ardently, instructing his lovely bride in the arts of matrimony. He was tender, patient, and understanding, as he had known beforehand he would have to be. A girl who gets to the age of twenty-six with her innocence intact is bound to require a little time for readjustment.

Still, by the time they came back, Tommy was beginning to feel a sense of failure. He *knew* that Candace had yet to experience the fulfillment she had hoped for, and that he had planned to give her.

Watching her across the breakfast table on the dining terrace of their new home, he was enthralled as ever. She was lovely in negligee, her soft hair falling around her face, her eyes shining with true love as they met his.

It was a warm day, and he saw, as he watched her, the tiny beads of sweat form on her upper lip. It took him back . . . way back . . . and from the vividness of the hospital scene, he skipped to an equally clear memory of that last visit to Armod, the teacher.

He smiled, and reached for his wife's hand, wondering if ever he would be able to tell her what had come of that walk they took to the village together. And he pressed her hand tighter, smiling again, as he realized that now, for the first time, he had a use for the further talents the old man had promised him.

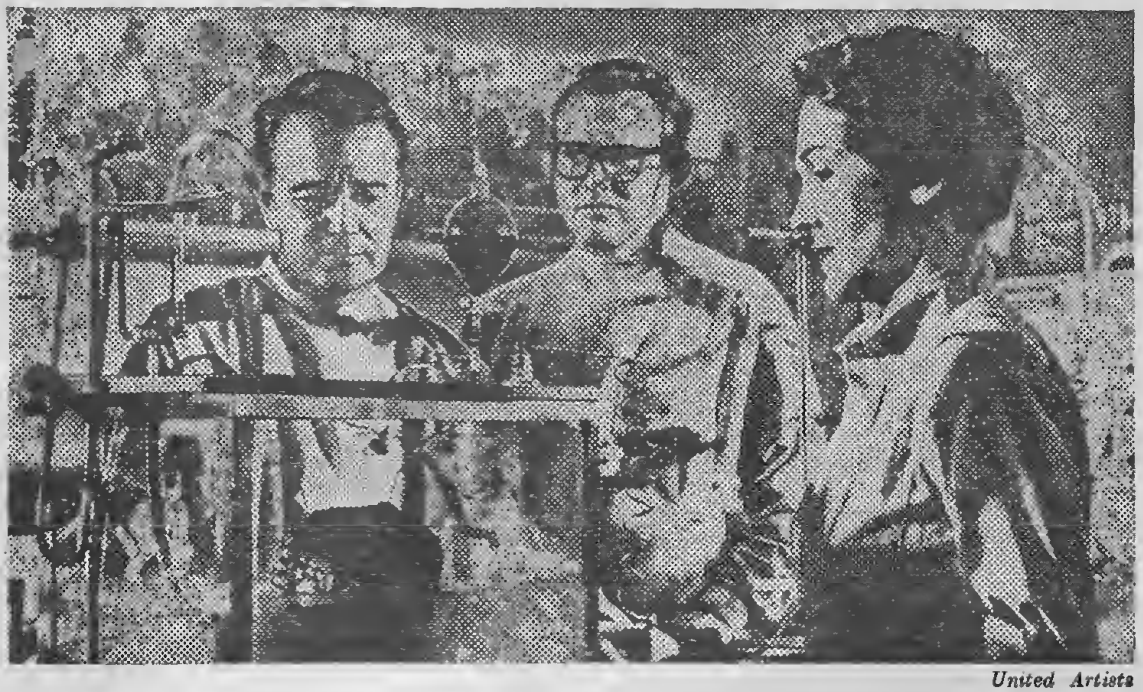
That would be one way to show Candace the true pleasure she did not yet know. If he could project his own thoughts and emotions. . . .

He let go of her hand, and sat back, sipping his coffee, happy and content, with just the one small problem to think about. *Maybe I should have gone back for a while, after all,* he thought idly.

"Perhaps you should have, dear," said innocent Candace. "I did."

Coming Next Issue

FINDERS KEEPERS by MARGARET ST. CLAIR



United Artists

Lew Ayres, Gene Evans and Nancy Davis in a tense scene

Donovan's Brain

A Science Fiction Movie Review

THERE'S an old saying that necessity makes strange bedfellows, and that seems to apply to the current crop of movies that we've taken to reviewing. Released through United Artists, the Dowling Productions version of "Donovan's Brain" is a blend of horror and science fiction.

This is the second film version of Curt Siodmak's classic novel, and is a considerably more effective version than the first. At any rate, it takes science fiction films one step away from outer space, rocket ships and similar garbled versions of science fiction fare. Second cousin to the old mad scientist theme, it still has some force as a story of human problems. It may be an easier placebo for the movie-going public to accept than some of the recent cinema offerings.

The familiar yarn of a doctor experimenting with keeping animal tissue alive, it brings to the screen the able talents of Lew Ayres as Doctor Cory. (Young Doctor Kildare is doing post-graduate work). Working in a desert lab assisted by his pretty wife, played by Nancy Davis, and a boozing medico sidekick portrayed by Gene Evans, Cory carries his experiment one step further. He applies his theories to a human brain when an accident victim dies in his lab. The brain belongs to Donovan, a ruthless millionaire, and the effect it has on Cory and others builds the tale toward a suspenseful climax.

This movie is considerably above average on several counts, acting among others. We'd like to commend also the camerawork of Joseph Biroc, the special effects and Eddie Dunstedter's excellent score.

—Pat Jones.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 7)

We could go on like this, but you get the idea. There are others we are too modest to bring up. The letters which ask us the most intimate personal questions—questions we couldn't even answer until we've read the new Kinsey book. Letters which make the most astonishing comments on people well-known in stf circles. Letters with all kinds of propositions—interesting, impossible or weird. It's quite a circus.

ETHERGRAMS

In the meantime, we'll try to clean them up a little and come out from backstage. Have a look at the newest crop.

SUBLIME CARE
by J. Dean Clark

Dear Minds: It has been my good fortune to obtain recently a considerable quantity of old SS & TWS. My collection from 1946 on is almost complete. No, this is not an advertisement, but the boasting of an SF neophyte. It is within my judicial power to look over the said magazines and render judgement that they have been one of the reasons for SF's popularity today. I consider its present size & format a consummate model for other SF magazines. These pages are trimmed, a novel appears complete in each issue, the artists are my favorites and stories are usually passable if not extremely better.

There, I have stated a lot of favorable facts about SS, so now I wish to give a few criticisms.

The Aug. cover was bad if not terrible. The man's olive-green face was sickening & the girl would have been more reasonably clothed *au naturel*. The dress served only to give a suggestion of sexiness that was not there.

I do not care for S. M. Jr. as an author.

I rather enjoyed Wm. Deeck's letter. Possibly, because I am curious about any boy who is 17 just learning that the stork is not to blame for his troubles.

While I am not fully in accord with how your cover girls are draped, I have no objections. Lunar landscapes would bore me also. What does bother me is your covers lacking substance, pictorial or symbolic. Spaceships, mechanical objects, semi-nudes nauseate me when they are brushed on canvas without any intelligent planning. Get this, I do not care whether the girls are stark-naked, if their bodies are woven into an aesthetic thought which may or not make them appear sexy. I consider the feminine form something to handle with sublime care, not an object to be used for cheap commercialism. So if you must use femininity to sell your magazine, have the artists handle those ephemeral beauties with greater discretion. Pardon my romanticism on women's bodies, but it does irk me when they are used ignobly.

Why is it that so many readers complain about other people's letters being full of moronic dribble? It seems so like one monkey telling another to dot his I's.

Another curiosity is that all the women who talk on sex emphatically point out that they are married. Should we think less of them if they were not? On my part I would think more of them.

K. F. Crossen's article "Throw out the science" seemed designed to attract attention to the author more than anything else.—*910 North D St., Poplar Bluff, Mo.*

We are relieved to learn that you consider the feminine form something to handle with sublime care; however we cannot resist pointing out that many other males have had the same idea and in fact this is the basic problem between the sexes which has existed since sex was invented.

Am happy to learn you consider the present popularity of science fiction to be due in no small measure to the groundwork done by SS and TWS. We are humble, but not unpleased.

A BLOW FOR MOWRER
by R. V. Haggard

Dear Sam: I have written very few letters to editors but this time I felt empowered to rise up on my hind legs and defend Prof. Mowrer against the onslaughts of people like Richard Geis.

Dick implies that neurosis and psychosis differ only in degree. Now the root stock of neurosis is from the Greek word neuron, meaning nerve and thus has a psysiological basis. The dictionary definition says any disease of the nerves in which no structural change is apparent. Psychosis comes from the Greek word psyche, meaning a giving of life or soul to. It is defined as any disease or disorder of the mind. What is the mind? Is it a collection of nerves or brain cells? Does it

have any physiological structure? I would like to see a physiological structure of the mind. It would help a lot in the work being done by psychologists the world over.

The next point at which I take umbrage is where he says that perhaps Prof. Mowrer is mistaken in saying that, "If you are neurotic it is because you want to be that way." Prof. Mowrer doesn't say anything about becoming neurotic. He says if you *are* neurotic . . . . . That in my definition means that you are maintaining this state of neurosis for reasons best known to you the individual. They may have tremendous value to you. The reasons may be deeply buried in our subconcious but they are there nevertheless and can be recovered by trained personnel.

The last point I'll discuss here is Dick's statement that personality is SET by the fifteenth year . . . NUTS! First let's define personality. It again comes from the Greek word persona meaning a mask. Thus generally speaking "personality" is a cloak or mask of behavior patterns which we have put on to gain the approval of certain individuals . . . . generally speaking these are our parents. These may have been installed through pain-punishment or reward systems but they have been installed. Now then if our personality is a mask, why can't we change it? It appears that it can be. Professionals in the field are doing it every day. I have observed some of these changes in others myself. "Basic character" is being changed in people where there is an honest desire to remedy a failing.

The rest of Dick's letter is not so bad. Some of the things he says I can agree with.

Now that the pressure is released I can tell you what I think about you and your magazine. I have followed SF since 1928 and have watched with interest the maturation of SF. You I am happy to say have kept pace with the field and in some cases have blazed the trail. I was happy to see the two stories by Farmer as they are a case of you blazing the trail. I enjoyed them as they were a departure from the general type of story one usually expects in SF. Thank you and keep our eyes open for other acceptable new thoughts in the SF field.—*1516 Second Ave., Seattle , Wash.*

Assuming you remember this little controversy over Prof. Mowrer's new theories in psychology, you will note that Russ Haggard replies to Dick's Geis-er on a scientific level, whereas our replies are not always distinguished for their dignity. But we admire Mr. Haggard's approach and we are strongly inclined to agree with him.

We have seen people change and when you have the same family or set of friends for thirty years or so you can measure these personality changes against the theories you read in the texts. Even Kinsey adds to this newer approach in his latest book on the female of the species, indicating that people continue to learn and change all the time, that their behavior patterns are never permanently set. Of course, some people's behavior patterns do get set—there are people who are too rigid, or too neurotic, or too frightened, or too pleased with themselves to change. And they make good material for novels. But the point is that they could change if they wanted to.

A new approach in psychosomatic medicine, for example, which you can find in Dr. Winter's book "Are Your Troubles Psychosomatic?" is the planting of an idea in a patient's mind, to wit: You have a choice. You can be sick or well—which do you prefer? For some time such a choice will not mean very much to a sick or confused person, but eventually the idea sinks in and begins to have meaning. You can nurse your troubles or you can decide the hell with it, you've had enough and you're going to act as if you're well. And that can do it—certainly in some cases.

LES FEMMES ENCORE

by Vieve Masterson

Dear Sam: Ah, the male ego 'tis, indeed a wondrous thing to behold! . . . . especially if it's a little bit irked. I have a few answers for Mr. Platts, too, but I won't put them all down here, wouldn't be very ladylike. It seems I read somewhere a woman always changes the subject when the one under discussion doesn't suit her. It was very amusing to note, that without exception, all the letters I received from men changed the subject entirely. Maybe they didn't like the discussion.

I must admit, though, he was the first to bring the foreign girls into this, he said it should be food for thought. So I thought. Here's where the ego comes in. The foreign women are taught from babyhood to cater to every whim their man might have. Of course this makes him feel like a real big shot. The women stay in the kitchen, take care of the babies, and have pipe, slippers, and newspapers ready for hubby when he comes home after a hard day at the office. They stay in their place, and offer no competition at all.

Ah, but here in America, things are different! The poor guy finds himself in competition with women everywhere. He has to fight for right of way on the highways, then makes jokes about women drivers. He finds her in the same business he is, and frequently stealing some of it away from him. There are few professions

you won't find a woman in somewhere. They begin to wonder where this man's world is, that they have heard so much about. A few years ago man very generously gave women the right to vote. He soon found himself facing her over a ballot box trying to get his job as Congressman or whatever it was he was running for, and losing. "Women in politics! Foolishness! Woman's place is in the kitchen, this is a man's world!" they snorted. Still women kept winning elective positions and doing a good job too. The whole thing stems from the time when the men were the "lord and master" and women were "chattels." Oh well, the battle of the sexes always has been, is, and most likely will be around until men realize and quit resenting the fact that women can do most anything as well, and sometimes better than they can.

I can't speak for the rest of the Fanettes, but I, for one, am not afraid I couldn't hold my own in a mixed group. Mr. Platts points out that it is difference in points of view, that keep things interesting. I might point out that it is rare to find two women who have the same point of view. There are plenty of different views, and contrary to gossip, it is not how to "trap and snare" a man. The fellows certainly think a lot of themselves, to think all we do is sit around and discuss new ways of catching them.

I think he just called us potty in hopes of getting a fight out of somebody. No doubt he will. But not from me. I've never had a two-way stretch on in my life. All I'll say is, I think he showed very bad taste to say a thing like that. Maybe he believes what he says though I don't know what kind of girls he has to go out with.

By the way, I came across some old issues of SS in a used mag store the other day. They were before your time, Sam, and I must say, you have certainly made a great improvement in the mag. It's amazing.—*2201 Arlington Ave., Birmingham, Ala.*

We have a strange feeling that you've fallen behind the times in some fashion. This outraged suffragette challenge comes after the battle is long won and over. Who do you know who still insists that woman's place is in the kitchen? And if you do, hadn't you better change your friends?

REAL GONE

by Norman J. Clarke

Dear Sam L. Mines: Science-fiction is a medium of art (though hardly highly developed as yet) which allows the artist almost unlimited scope for imagination, within certain rather arbitrary limits; in this instance, credible extrapolation on proven or assumed scientific principles. Similarly, jazz is a medium of art which allows the artist almost unlimited scope for imagination, again within certain rather arbitrary limits; in this case, meaningful extrapolation on basic chordal patterns. Also, both require a fair amount of intelligence on the part of the reader or listener. In s-f the reader must be able to comprehend certain scientific principles and visualize their extensions; in jazz, the listener must be able to discern the underlying chord structure as well as its extensions via the melody line.

To carry this still further, it might be added that s-f and jazz have evolved together, through almost the same number of years, to achieve almost the same present status. To the fen, it is well-known that an outsider thinks of science fiction in terms of green men on the moon and guns that go ZAP!—just as jazz means, to most people, dim, smoky rooms filled with raucous blare and sweating, contorted bodies. BUT—as s-f began with just such green men and ZAP-guns and jazz with just such smoke, blare and sweat, so today s-f has advanced to something approaching Literature, and jazz as something nearing Serious Music. In fact, both are somewhat Arty these days. And, to these eyes at least, it appears that both forms continue to advance toward the point where they will be on a par with other art forms.

Upon re-reading that last sentence, I am shocked to find that my words reflect optimism of a sort. This will never do. Please note, though, that I said " . . it *appears* etc. . ." Well, I suppose that's about enough to say on the subject, for this *is* a science-fiction magazine, and not a bop (horrible word) periodical. Still, in some strange way, jazz and s-f are linked in my mind—perhaps because the *aficionados* of each are misunderstood and often ridiculed minority groups. Ah well, brethren, *we* see the Light.

Note: I like "Jazzbo" Collins' Purple Grotto program, and listen to it whenever I am able to pick it up, way up here in Ollawat as my frenetic fan-friend, Daryl Sharp, is wont to say. ("Say what you wont to say," I always tell him.) Oh yeah. S-f Modern Jazz fans, please write. That's all about jazz.

So Ole Gregg The Oopsla is in the Marines. Do I dare to call them the U. S. Meringues? Do I dare and do I dare? Perhaps not.

By the by, if this letter sees print (it will, won't it, Sam? Sam? Sometime next July, anyhows?) I would like to inform one Mr. John Cortois that I did not fail to answer his letter because of any snobbery on my part, but simply because I somehow managed to lose the damn thing, and so had no way of knowing his address. Although, I *did* have grounds for snobbery, for Mr. Cortois is the type who tells jokes without punchlines, curse him.

Have I ever mentioned that my new fan magazine will not be called FOOTLE, will not cost three (3) dollars per semi-weekly, four-page issue, but will however, accept cash contributions from reliable persons. Copies

will be distributed to subscribers by native runner.—*411 Mayfair Ave., Ottawa, Ont., Canada.*

Your little be-bop heart should be gladded by a Brunwick release entitled IMPRESSIONS OF OUTER SPACE, played by Larry Elgart and his ensemble. Here is a synthesis you might have created yourself —jazz AND science fiction. And the fact that the program notes for said album were written by ye ed shouldn't spoil it too much for you. Being as optimistic as you are. . . .

BANNERS AND WELFARE

by Sandor Esterhazy

Dear Sam: A few of my friends have asked me as a psychologist the reason for the sudden slump in the demand for science fiction magazines. First the slump was not sudden but rather gradual and second, more *individuals* are reading probability-perspective literature than ever before. Science fiction is only a perspective carried to its logical conclusion in fictional form.

Take myself for instance. When there was only one science fiction mag I read it, also when it became two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight—but then I drew the line. It was my pride that when meeting another SF fan that he could not mention a story or rather plot-perspective which was foreign to me. But I drew the line on buying or reading more than eight a month. So when thirty magas were on the stand I bought none for months and then came to buy again so that I now buy about one a week.

Also science fiction is a mode of reasoning, a desire to forestall the bondage of social restrictions. Growing up in our civilized world means only the acceptance of fixed ideas. Therefore science fiction appeals to the young as a protest against growing up and to lunatics like myself who though we have white beards refuse to be anything but Peter Pans in our minds. But Peter Pan, young or old, wants to have one thing in common—mastery of our vice. And this cannot be where there are too many magazines or else our singularity is published in mordant popular magazines. Peter Pan is not like everyone else, even if some try to mold him in the image of the moron.

To read science fiction in magazines devoted to this genre is different from reading same in books. The magazine is constant fare in which the reader stands as a monitor constantly analyzing and reviewing not only the mental processes of the writer, the artistic development or decline of an artist, but also the functioning of the editor in his job. Science fiction is the only medium in which this takes place, but to do this we must be able to read all and see all, not just once a year, but within logical times.

Also the environmental air must of necessity be conducive to the feeling of freedom in the discussion of ideas as well as the freedom of research. In the last year science has felt the heavy hand, not only of the bigot but also of that peculiar breed so synonymous of Mickurism in the USSR. I mean of course those business men who apparently now rule in Washington to whom the utilitarian "rule of the market place" is more important than abstract scientific gains. And what more abstract than trying to reach the moon? What is the profit in it?

This tendency on the part of our bigots and demagogues to sway the people into restricted forms of thinking, in their way just as restricted as Communism, is reflected socially in the reading of science fiction. What competition can science fiction give to the big lie of Adolph Hitler? None because the Hitlerian big lie has the appearance of truth applied to present day events, while science fiction is a lot of little lies, all of which is acknowledged as such.

In a social atmosphere of reaction, the science fiction reader young and old holds aloft the banner of intellectual freedom. Each of us, every time we buy a science fiction magazine rings the bell for freedom of investigation in all matters which concerns the human welfare. And we will be able to tell if we are losing or winning the battle, for we will never lose the war, by whether the science fiction fan increases or decreases as a social manifestation.

In the meanwhile we can take pride that today we have more real science fiction readers than ever before in our time. To all the Peter Pans to whom all things are possible, and human potentials limitless, I send my greetings and love.—*1027 West 8th Place, Los Angeles, Cal.*

Regarded as escape literature, nothing surpasses science fiction. It is considerably more than that, however. For years it has been a testing ground of new ideas, welcoming the provocative and challenging. By comparison our other fields of writing have seemed stagnant or barren. And whether our friends the fans be classified as lunatics, white-beards or perennial Peter Pans, one thing must be said for them—they are freer of intolerance than any other group which can be so singled out. We confess to a warm spot for them too. . . .

SOLUTION

by Thurlow E. Hanson Jr.
U.S.N.A.S. Navy 3835 VR-23

Dear Sam, S. F. is the first step, but not a

purposeful one. S. F. could be the stepping stone to a new approach of solving the riddles of our basic sciences. By this I am referring mainly to such articles that contain accurate scientific info-plus, some good rum-running exploits of the imagination all jumbled obtrusively together to make an interesting yarn.

S. F. tales that offer a high degree of scientific accumulations, concepts and theory are difficult to come by and are unprintable because the average American has never been tutored on scientific terminologies or otherwise. Yet there is always a young mind eager to learn the unknown revelations that stand before him, to see the world in bold terms of definite explanation and comprehensive reasoning, rather than remain in the superstitious stupor that affects so many. However a large percentage of these people are knocked down and out before they're even started by the apparent lack of interest shared by others and their own inability to maintain their ego in the face of temporary financial difficulties, which may prohibit the use of educational facilities.

The solutions to many problems are merely the difficulty in maintaining an interest in them. And if this civilization is to survive we must maintain our sciences. This solution can be assisted considerably, along with many new subscriptions by publishing more shorts (or longs) of scientific interest, as the word (Science) Fiction denotes.—*C/O F. P. O. San Francisco, California. Atsugi, Japan.*

The most ardent supporters of science fiction can hardly expect it to provide solutions for the riddles of our sciences. At best it is just what Mr. Esterhazy, in the preceding letter called it: a literature of probability-perspectives. What it can do, therefore, is to stimulate a lot of minds into going out and looking for answers which might otherwise not have been stimulated. And if it can do that it has done enough for a medium which is basically entertainment rather than education.

Maintaining the ego in the face of setbacks, financial or otherwise, is the prime difficulty for most people, since a feeling of insecurity seems to be an almost universal problem. We are inclined to think that of the many remedies suggested to help this condition, personal education is the only answer, slow and painful as it may be.

THE TROUBLE WITH LIFE
by M. Desmond Emery

Hi Sam: Not only do you relegate my last letter to the "also-rans" column, you even spell my name wrong. What could I do but write in and give you a piece of my mind? However, on second thought, I won't. There's only enough for me anyway and my energies must be conserved for the fans. It's too late to change people over when they become editors—they just point a blue pencil at you and poof!—there goes inspiration. With fen, it's a different matter. A person can make some sort of impression on their soft little brains, even if only a dent.

Firstly, Deeck (the Geeck—thank you, Carol) should be frayed, right down the middle of his thick head—with a riposte, at that. Serve him right if someone did challenge him to a duel, the bounder. I could forgive him for being what he is, or what he seems to be according to his letters, but he has gone too far in insulting the best mags in the field—which are yours. If I knew how to riposte he would now be one of the dear departed.

Tell Arthur Koestler anybody can identify with a green, scaly, eight-armed bem when he stops thinking of it as such. True, not everybody could do that, but that does not mean stf will not be a recognized form of literature. How many fully understand poetry, or Shakespeare even? Yet they are surely literature. Understanding or recognition is not a prerequisite of literature, for the masses. As long as a certain form of writing has appeal to a certain part of the population, it's literature. Perhaps we had better add to that last part that the appeal must continue over a long period of time —like Shakespeare.

Walter Scheps is wrong. As long as religion is part of life, it should be discussed everywhere. That's the trouble with life nowadays. Everything is compartmentalized. "Do this Now. Do that Then. Go to church on Sunday and be religious during the day. The rest of the week, go to hell anyway you want. Don't bring religion into stf. Don't bring religion into politics. Don't bring religion into sex. It belongs in church." As long as religion is a force in today's life, it should be brought into every subject in which it has an application. Naturally, this also applies to every other ideological force—democracy, the thirst for learning, all of them.

If this gets in TEV, I'd like to say to all the fen who have written that I'm awfully busy with the new stf club we're forming up here and that I'll try to write them soon.—*93 Hemlock St., St. Thomas, Ont., Canada.*

Glad you didn't give us a piece of your mind—you really couldn't spare it and what could we do with it?

Don't worry about Arthur Koestler. Did you read his autobiography "Arrow In The Blue?" Changes his mind about as often as his shoes. Next year he'll be defending stf as the most vigorous force in American literature.

JUST BABIES
by Carol McKinney

Dear Sam: Ted Hinds left out a few points in his statements about the large vs. the small family. Back at the turn of the century large families were the rule rather than the exception because of 2 main reasons—no knowl-

edge of birth control and just because everyone (practically) wanted large families. Lots of children were very handy to have in the rural areas—and there were more of them at that time. I suppose it was during the giddy 20's that young couples became too involved in the social whirl to want to bother with more than 1 or 2 bawling brats. Then the depression came—and nobody but a moron or poorly educated couples wanted to impoverish themselves and the other offspring still further by any unwelcome additions.

During the war lots of rules were broken and people had babies right and left. After the war a partial feeling of security settled around the returning GI's and their brides and many of them began to plan for large families —maybe 5 or 6 kids, which isn't large compared to the families of the early 1900s, but was to those of the 20s and 30s.

Don't everyone scream for my head now, but I think that more couples are *afraid* to have large families today because of the uncertain future ahead of us. It isn't very encouraging to have to spend every last dime of the breadwinner on rent, food, clothing, and other bills, and have scarcely anything left for all the other items such as medical bills, incidental schooling expenses, entertainment or other little exras. And if the wife works, that's another argument for small families. They feel that if they are just barely getting along on what both of them make how can they afford for her to quit work and have a baby? Too many things cost too darn much today. It's a rat race. Anyone who has more than three kids these days is either nuts or very brave. And there *are* a lot of very brave people scrimping along today. You undoubtedly know quite a few yourself. And maybe you're one of them. Good luck to you!—*377 East 1st North, Provo, Utah.*

One small item seems to have been left out of all these discussions about many children vs. few. The religious, moral and economic angles have been thoroughly hashed over. But nobody has pointed out that some people *like* a lot of kids around the house and others do not. Some people are natural-born parents, or take their children so casually that there is never any tension about it. Others make a dreadful job of rearing children and are forever dashing off to the pediatrician or the psychiatrist (for their own nerves). And others just don't like the whoop and holler that goes with children and would rather not be bothered. When dealing with the human animal, we've got to remember that there are all kinds.

We won't tell them how many you've got, Carol.

AND CHILDREN . . .

by Nancy Share

Dear Sam: I got quite a snicker from Ted

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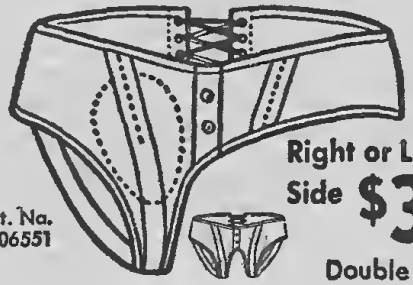

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Hinds' letter . . . "on long winter nights sitting in front of the fireplace. . . ."! I wonder how large a family *he* came from? Two? Large families don't have time to sit around in front of fireplaces on winter evenings, Mr. Hinds . . . *if* they have a fireplace to begin with. By the time you have completed all the chores assigned to you, you begin working on your school homework, and by that time you're so pooped you almost fall into bed. That idea of a large family sitting happily around a fireplace on long winter nights is strictly from the movies, bub. Ever stop to think why rich people (as a majority) do not have many children? The explanation is simple: if they did have large families they wouldn't be rich for long. It takes money, and lots of it, to raise a family of 6 or 8 or 10 kids. Money for food, clothes, taxes (school and local), lights, water, rent, heat, etc.

I'm the oldest of 8 kids, and I do not remember sitting around any fireplaces while I was young. Maybe this was done when our parents were children, but not while we were. I do, however, agree with you on the subject of large families being fun. We had fun even though there wasn't always enough money to spend for movies, skating rinks, candy, etc. But like Sam said, there was a favorite child of our parents in our brood, and we all wore hand-me-downs. Even I, the oldest, wore them most of the time, and when I grew out of them, my sisters wore them . . . and so on till the hand-me-downs became too "hand-me-down-looking" and ended up as dust clothes, window washing rags, etc. It's fun to be a member of a large family, but it is also something to be avoided if possible.

So tell me, Mr. Hinds . . . how many brothers and sisters do you have? And are your parents rich? Children from a large family have a tendency to be better adjusted? Phooey! What about the favored child? And the older bossy child (which I was . . . and still am)? Again, phooey! Did you ever notice how many children from larger families run away from home? Why do they do this? Because they are being formed into a "better adjusted person"? Or is it because they can't stand the poverty, the worrying their parents do about money for food and rent, etc? I disagree with Sam, too, about "not every 'only' child being spoiled." Every one I've even known has been spoiled . . and tho there may be a few isolated cases in the world, I do not think there are enough to be mentioned. A child from a rich family, or a child who is the only child, is usually given every thing it wants. Most of them are apt to enjoy life more fully than the child who comes from a large family tho. Help . . . where am I?!

Didn't mean to go on at such length, Sam. Frank Lewis is right: the females are ruining TEV . . . (some of them, not all) . . . (Mary Corby is one of the exceptions . . . her letters, I enjoy because of their maturity and clarity of thought). Tut, tut, Sam . . . before you say anything . . . how do you know I am a female? I could be a pen name for some male, you know! So, now you can publish this letter without worrying about the wrath which would surely befall mine head otherwise. (Who's modest anyway?)—*P. O. Box 31, Danville, Pa.*

P.S. Will you marry me?

There's a point there. Even in large families there is a favored child or two, who may be as thoroughly spoiled as an only child. In fact, we part company with the behaviorists on many points: you can spoil a child or not spoil a child and the way he turns out still has some connection with the genes and chromosones which make up his basic character. Environment molds, but it doesn't control absolutely. From an economic standpoint, an only child, or one of a few, should get a better start in life than one of a brood where the money for shoes is hard to come by, let alone piano lessons and college educations.

P.S. Thanks for the offer—it's the best one I've had this year, but aren't there some husbands and wives involved?

BARBECUED BARBARIANS

by Joe Keogh

Salutations, Sam: It just doesn't pay any more to get up in the air about letters like Deeck's or Burns'. Someimes when I squint really hard at their offerings, I can almost imagine seeing an informative column of assorted Wildroot Cream-oil Charlie epics, or even a thought-provoking column inch of how to become a private eye.

Besides all that, I suspect, yea, I am confident that you relish throwing us this "letter-bait"—Moskowitz, Hammond, or Seibel may have come up with something controversial before, but these two personages can put more disbelief, cynicism, and iconoclasm into a letter than I thought humanly possible. But then, of course, that's assuming the verity of the letter qualification. I notice Wm. Deeck's current letter tends toward a policy of aggressive appeasement, which will net him nil. He's almost as good at insulting himself as he does others. But enough of that, on to more agreeable subjects.

Or are they? Here I am, wondering about one extreme in our fair column TEV, when staring me in the face is the other. The space opera advocate, who condemns all abstract thinking, shatters the newsprint with his pleas for the return of a certain captain almost as well-buried as old Sarge Saturn, and throwing libelous utterances right and left at something called Deeck. See what I mean?

So the Behrmans and Deecks will have their condescending little laughs at the "barbarians" of TEV, while these same "barbarians," blissfully unaware of the "high-level" sarcasm, continue their own ravings at the "toffs" (to use a good British slang expression I came across the other day). And it gets them all nowhere, though at a fast clip.

Perhaps we could rid the column of these two extremes, Sam, but I suppose your reasoning is that you haven't even finished pouring the oil on the troubled waters when they start lighting it. And you *love* fracases.—*63 Glenridge Ave., St. Catharines, Ont.*

Our secret is out. Curses. But you'll admit we used the very best grade of oil, even if it was inflammable?

DIPLOMACY

by Fredrick B. Christoff

Dear Sam: Please print a letter by MariAn Cox every issue. She's a real humorist that gal and this month she outdid herself. I would like to write her but she tears up all letters that come from males. She says, "If a gal spends all her time thinking and talking about boys she's boy crazy." Who says that? Not I! Nor any male I know either. These so called "Boy Crazy" girls are more intelligent than their sisters, they realize that the male world is much more interesting than that of the females so they take a great interest in males and go out with a good number of them. This in turn makes the other frustrated females jealous and nasty. It also takes their reasoning (if any) along indecent lines, but they are very sly about it, they don't come out and bluntly state their opinions but beat around the bush and think up such terms as "Boy Crazy." Nuts! Females are persecuted not because the male thinks he is superior but because a woman demands abuse. In fact her happiness depends upon it. Marian and her little band of idiots are now very happy cause most of the males have been taking swipes at the Fannettes which is what they wanted in the first place. When Marian started her club she said the reason for it was because she was tired of the way the females were being pushed around in the letter columns and fanzines. Well I did some checking on the letter column part. Starting with the Jan. 1947 issue of S.S. I started reading the letters and up to the time of Marian's decision to start her all-female club there were only about two dozen letters that seriously objected to females in TEV so where does she get that business about females being pushed around in the letter columns?

One Daryl Sharp, who happens to be a friend of mine, makes with the suggestion that SS go slick. I'm thinking that this fran should drop dead, the same to you Cleopatra if you are harboring any such ideas. I hates serials and I hates all but one slick you unnerstand I hates em.

We will now tune in for station identification.

Someone once started the rumor that there was a creature called a "Canfan" if this is true I would like these creatures to contact me in regards to TCSFCC.

What's that you say, Sam? You think so? Okay good-bye I go:—*39 Cameron St. S., Kitchener, Ont.*

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make any appropriate rejoinders. Freddy, we toss you to the fans. En garde.

THAT WESTERN FLAVOR

by Chas. C. Thompson

Dear Sirs: I purchased June STARTLING STORIES and much to my dismay discovered two western stories right smack in the middle of this issue—DELTA DEPUTY and THE HENRY GUN.

As I am very much a science fiction reader, you can guess my reaction to these westerns.

Please see that I get my July issue minus the cowboys.—*Rt. 2, Keokuk, Iowa.*

A pristine copy of the June issue, plus a complimentary copy of the August issue has been sent injured reader Thompson, with the apologies of the printing department.

REPORT FROM DOWN UNDER

by Vol Molesworth

Dear Editor: It is a long time since I last wrote to America.

First of all, let me congratulate you on STARTLING and T.W.S. Recently, Maurice Powell of Oakland, Cal., sent me a bundle of your magazines, stretching from around June, 1952, to April, 1953. I must admit that until now I have looked somewhat askance on your magazines, but I received a very great surprise to discover the great improvement in the stories in these issues. I was even more surprised (and delighted) by the letters. In fact, I found myself reading all the letters before I read the stories.

It was by reading the letters that I got a lead to THE LOVERS. To find out what the fuss was all about, I read THE LOVERS. Then I hunted out MOTHER and SAIL ON. And I have this to say: Mr. Farmer impresses me as the most outstanding stf. writer since Ray Bradbury and A. E. Van Vogt burst upon us.

We hear a great deal about "mature" science fiction. Most of it is an advertising stunt to attract readers. But it seems to me that your magazines have achieved the near-miracle of presenting science fiction that is new and stimulating. I consider Farmer's stuff to be mature in that he approaches a topic objectively, in particular a topic which is tailor-made for schoolboyish treatment. Some people write about rockets; some write about sex. Any protest against Farmer's stories would be on the same level as the protest we heard against Anson Macdonald's tales in aSF in the 40's. The answer given then was simply: "Isn't sociology a science?" The answer to be given now is: "Isn't biology a science?"

I haven't the space to comment on stories stretching over six or seven issues, but my over-all reaction is this: you are publishing material which strikes me as new and invigorating, and this after fourteen years of reading science fiction. Can I say more?—Yes: this. Can you keep it up?

And now some information about fandom in Australia. As you probably know, all American magazines were banned here in June, 1940, as a wartime emergency measure to save dollars and conserve shipping space. The war ended, I am told, in 1945. Somebody should tip off the Australian Customs: the ban on U. S. magazines persists. The only copies of the U.S. prozines that are seen in Australia are those sent to us by open-hearted American fans.

Despite this stf. starvation, fandom is flourishing down under. Our national body, Australian Science Fiction Society (our counterpart of your N.F.F.F.) has now enrolled more than 150 members. Our Second Australian Convention, held May 1-2-3, attracted no less than 84 fans. The Futurian Society of Sydney, which has been operating since 1939, and has now held nearly 200 meetings, has 21 members. Every Thursday night in Sydney there is an informal meeting, at which fans bid at auction, see stf. films, and just plain talk. Attendance last Thursday night was 46.

Activity is also stepping up in other States. There are groups active now in Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth.

The fanzine position isn't bad, either. Graham Stone edits *Science Fiction News,* a photolitho monthy; the Futurian Society of Sydney puts out *Futurian Society News;* the femme fans publish *Vertical Horizons;* Doug. Nicholson has put out two issues of his semi-pro, *Forerunner;* the Melbourne group puts out *Etherline, Perhaps* and *Bacchanalia.*

Our own printing press has produced four books—Larnach's *Checklist of Australia Fantasy,* and in the fiction line *Zero Equals Nothing* by Roy Williams and G. B. Stone, and two fantasies of mine, *Blinded They Fly* and *Let There Be Monsters!*

And now, a plea. What do Australian fans (Aussifans; Auslans; take your pick) do for reading matter? Well, the Futurian Society of Sydney has a lending library of some 170 books and 410 magazines. We can use more! If any American fan can imagine what it would be like to visit a bookshop and find *no* stf. mags on sale, then let him dig deep in that pocket and buy up some back issues and send us. But a warning as yet, we have no Australian science fiction promags to send in exchange. We can send you our fanzines, and our deep appreciation and thanks. But we do ask you to do your little bit in spreading stf. round the world.

Lastly, Mr. Editor, there is the matter of our next Convention. It is scheduled for Easter, 1954, and we are planning well in advance for a bung-up, three-day affair. We hope to get 100 along. Americans fans can support us by sending material for the auction, sending over special issues of their fanzines, or by taking advertisements in the Special Souvenir Booklet. You can take a full page

advt. for two dollars; a half-page for one dollar. The dollars thus raised will help us get some good all-American science fiction. Don't send any money—write me for further details.—*160 Beach Street, Coogee, Sydney, Australia.*

American readers will be glad of this resume giving an account of fan activities in Australia. We had to cut some of the letter but only personal stuff. However, to answer one of the questions which got left out, Vol, foreign authors submitting manuscripts to a U.S. publishing firm generally enclose return postage in the form of an international postal coupon, which I presume can be purchased at your post office. Good luck.

And space runs out. So a quick look at who's left. Hank Moskowitz, Three Bridges, New Jersey, provides a documented rebuttal against what he calls certain slanders concerning his remarks about Ray Bradbury's "westerns" and Ken Crossen's editorial. We got mixed up, Hank, about the time Pogo got into the argument. Louis H. Pease, RFD #1, Colchester, Vermont says women like to get together as a relief from the adoring simpleton act they have to put on for men. Calvin Thos. Beck, Box 497, Hackensack, N. J. announces that the American Science Fantasy Society is back in business—write for details. Walter Scheps, 1102 Longfellow Ave., New York 59, N. Y. sends a Captain Future poem.

Ron Ellik, 232 Santa Ana, Long Beach, Cal. is rushing out to buy an album of IMPRESSIONS OF OUTER SPACE. Henry Cote, Germfask, Mich., is confused by a teacher who told him there is no moon, it is only a reflection of the sun. What she must have meant is that the moon gives off no light of its own—it is merely a reflection of the sun, Henry. So far as we know there is a moon, tho. Dead, you know. Gregg Calkins, Headquarters Battalion 12-DA-1, MCB, Camp Pendleton, Cal., hails his delivery from the doghouse and announces a new fanzine to replace OOPSLA, titled STARFLAME. Such dignity.

C. van den Heever Jnr, 7 Palala Rd., Westcliffe, Johannesburg, S. Africa, getting his SS belatedly, takes umbrage at Tom Pace's remarks about South Africa's racial policy and opines that the U. S. treats its Negroes just as badly—worse, he says. Wayne Strickland, 4920 Orchard Ave., San Diego, 7, Cal. wants to know if we

[*Turn page*]

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have any intention of going digest size? Roger Godwin, 624 Elbow Drive, Calgary, Alberta, Canada wants to contact fans in Calgary and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Practically neighboring cities. Samuel Johnson, Elizabeth City, N. C. says if a line is just a series of points placed side by side there ain't no such thing because a point has no length, width or thickness, so how can you place them side by side? Search us, we only work here. H. Maxwell, 354 W. 56th St., New York 19, N. Y., wants us to run for President. Of what? Roy C. Zukerman, RA 19452777, Hq. Det. 6017 ASU Camp Hanford, Wash., says William Conner forgot something when he said "It takes all kinds to make a world." He should have added, "I'm glad I'm not one of them!"

Huh?

John D. Walston, Vashon, Wash., gets in a little early electioneering for Adlai Stevenson, under the impression it will help science fiction and asks for friends in Seattle, as he is moving there soon. Ray Thompson, 410 South 4th St., Norfolk, Nebr., thinks he's not getting enough glue on the backs of his envelopes—they're not sticking to the ceiling in our well-known method of selection, so not getting into print. Arda Kauer, Vendome Hotel, Minneapolis, Minn., wants to see a letter printed, hates to think of all that poison being wasted. Don Wegars, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley 2, Cal., says SS prints only high-grade professional material, so therefore THE UNPREY SPRAY didn't appear therein. Richard L. St. Onge, 3170 Stickney Ave., Toledo 8, Ohio, thinks if we take sex and religion out of the stories we won't have much left. Ohboy, what the real fans will tell you!

David Fitzgerald, 800 W. 32nd St., Baltimore 11, Md., liked THE TIME MASTERS. Earl Franklin Baker, 1310 North McCann St., Kokomo, Indiana, feels this way about letter writers: "I never saw a jug of Xeno, I'd sorta like to see one, but sometimes letters make me feel, the author has just drank one!" James Chamlee, 208 N. 9th St., Gaterville, Texas, wants to know why we don't print more letters from Texans. Why son, all our stories are written by Texans. Some living temporarily in other states, of course. Dale Wilson, 11 Summit Ave., Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, Canada, is 17 and a high school senior, wants to gas with anyone who'll write to her in her own age group. Jim Harmon, 427 E. 8th St., Mt. Carmel, Ill., pulls ye olde maestro's leg a bit, but we forgive him. We are not Horatio at the bridge, Jim, nor are we the Lone Ranger, nor even Captain Video.

John G. Fletcher, 347 Oak Road, Glenside, Pennsylvania, wants to know if Deeck is for real (all too real, alas—Ed.) and warns sternly, "don't go pocket-size!" H'm, must be near-sighted. And Deeck himself, Wm. Deeck, 8400 Potomac Ave., Cellege Park, Md., rebuffs Harry Arms: "I did not crawl out of a Mickey Spillane novel . . . I am a character in one." Somebody's going to agree with you, kid.

Ed Luksus, 3717 Johnson St., Gary, Ind., agrees, he says, with Deeck the Geeck. Stop picking on Wm., he says. Leonard Gleicher, Tenterden Garden, London, N.W. 4, England, has the world's worst handwriting—will somebody send him a typewriter? He liked MOTH AND RUST and refers to us as an eddy-tear. Quien sabe? W. B. Whitham, 8070 Massicotte, Champlain Village, Montreal 5, Canada, says he has yet to read one letter that wasn't tripe. Don Allen, 3 Arkle St., Gateshead 8, Co. Durham, England, says we print terrific stories, but England's flag will be the first to be raised on the moon. Imperialism, yet. Richard Henderson, 2822 Seville Court, Jacksonville 7, Fla., asks if we ever printed any of Fred Brown's stories. Didn't you ever hear of WHAT MAD UNIVERSE? PI IN THE SKY, KNOCK, ALL GOOD BEMS and so on? We printed *most* of them.

Frank M. Willmore, 4 Waterloo Place, Ramsgate, Kent, England, was intrigued by WHO'S CRIBBING, since Thromberry was his uncle. (Come on, now, a joke's a joke—Ed.) Steve Levin, 780 N. Gower St., RKO RADIO PICTURES, Hollywood 38, Cal., just back from Korea, wants to catch up on the mags he has missed and will trade foreign stamps for 1951 to 1954 issues. 30 stamps per magazine. Pat Harris, Gen. Delivery, Tacoma, Wash., confesses to being a real stf addict, grabs every mag on the stands. Lewis Kovner, 1113 N. Myers St., Burbank, Cal., has tried all the mags and decided that SS and TWS are tops. (advt.) Says he has ferreted out ye ed's terrible secret. We wrote a giant five page novel which ap-

peared in the Dec. 47 issue of TWS. It was good, he says, how can you stuff anything bad into five pages? Are you kidding?

Richard Harter, Highmore, S. Dakota, gripes about fans who tell others how to write and adds he has no malice, he is only malicious. Alan Couter, Box 226, Red Rock, Ontario, Canada, a loyal fan offers us a hideout if we need one—privacy and fish guaranteed. Hold the offer open, boy. Daryl Sharp, Apt. 5, 100 Alice St., Eastview, Ontario, is recovered from his trip to New York, grumbles that in all this talk of sex nobody ever mentions his favorite subject, the sex-life of the Eastern Anaesthesian night-crawler. Wormy topic. Dick Clarkson is back at Harvard to be studied, Leverett H-33, Cambridge 38, Mass. George W. Earley, 507 Castle Drive, Apt. D, Baltimore 12, Md., gripes we never gave him back the quarter we promised him for not appreciating THE LOVERS. Was that you in the Club Room of the Bellevue-Stratford, George? Somebody got a free beer.

Geoff M. Wingrove, 6 Tudor Close, Cheam, Surrey, England, is founding a fanmag called FISSION and wants material (from us!—Ed.) He doesn't know what he is asking.

The THIRD AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE FICTION CONVENTION is scheduled for Easter, 1954. Write Graham B. Stone, Box 4788 G.P.O., Sydney, N.S. W. Kit Soucy, 48228W, Soucy HL, RCAF

[*Turn page*]

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF Startling Stories, published bi-monthly at Kokomo, Ind., for October 1, 1953. 1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Publisher, Better Publications, Inc., 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. Editor, Samuel Mines, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. Managing editor, None. Business manager, Harry Slater, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. 2. The owner is: Better Publications, Inc., 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y., N. L. Pines, 10 E. 40th St., New York, N. Y. 3. The known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None. 4. Paragraphs 2 and 3 include, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting; also the statements in the two paragraphs show the affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner. Harry Slater, business manager. Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1953. Eugene Wechsler, Notary Public. (My commission expires March 30, 1954)

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Station, St. Hubert, Que., is pleased that we occasionally forget the editorial "we". Likes informality. Kit doesn't say, but from internal evidence in the letter, we gather she's a girl, not a flying cadet. Carol Van Bladel, 507 N. LeClaire Ave., Chicago 44, Ill., dabbles a timid toe in the raging controversial waters, wants to know howcome Carol McKinney is on every letter page of every science fiction magazine? She's a fast typist, Carol. Sid Sullivan is mad, wants to know why stories of matriarchies always have the women domineering and arrogant and the men nincompoops. A woman, she says, is a woman. Cheers. She's at 725 Rosselle, Jacksonville, Fla. Ev Lawrence, 104 Lake Street, Ithaca, N. Y., says to criticize a story properly you have to first check your personal prejudices and be impartial. Fred Seegmueller, East Markle St., Phila. 28, Pa., reminds Bruce Sabsay that Voltaire is dead, which he seems to think is a lovely example. Tsk, tsk, boys. Al Forman, A02, 2535711, Fighter Sqdr. 154, c/o F.P.O., San Francisco, Cal., wants to know how the girl got into the flask in Popp's cover on the August issue. That's what makes it science fiction, Al.

Edwin B. Tee, 241 Hale End Road, Woodford Green, Essex, England, says we have improved tremendously, but could improve plenty yet. Tom Pace, US 53194526, Co. E, 28th Inf. Ft. Jackson, S. C., is currently working for Uncle Sugar. Wants to unload 500 stf mags and about 50 books. If interested, *don't* write to above army address, but to Tom Pace at Brewster, Florida. Del Palmer, Garfield, N. J., guesses that Phil Farmer is: Bradbury or Leinster or Heinlein or Crossen or Kuttner or Brackett or van Vogt or Vance—Good guessing, Del. A. G. Chapman, The Lodge, East Malling, Maidstone, Kent, England, is a 27 year old school master and wonders how to introduce science fiction to the budding minds of his pupils. Any American school teachers want to write him?

Bill Walker, 305 Main St., Watsontown, Pa., thinks maybe we are human after all. That was Phyllis Ross, Bill. Wally Parsons, 90 Wheeler Ave., Toronto 8, Ont., Canda—oop, did you expect us to print that? We're beat. See you all back here next time.

Happy landings. —*The Editor.*

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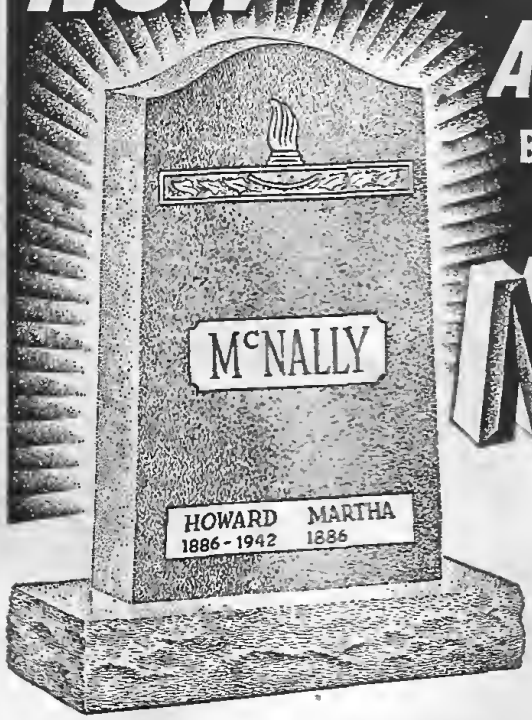

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